Supreme Court, U.S.
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IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

ONEIDA LTD.,
Petitioner,

v.

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,
Respondent.

On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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October 9, 2009

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QUESTION PRESENTED

Does bankruptcy law control whether a contingent claim in a bankruptcy proceeding is a "pre-petition" claim subject to compromise or discharge (as held by the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits) or may non-bankruptcy law provide the rule of decision (as held by the Third Circuit and the Second Circuit below)?

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDING

All parties are listed in the caption.

RULE 29.6 STATEMENT

Petitioner Oneida Ltd. is privately held and has no parent corporation. J.P. Morgan Securities Inc., a subsidiary of publicly held JPMorgan Chase & Co., owns more than 10 percent of Oneida Ltd.'s stock. No other publicly held corporation owns 10 percent or more of Oneida Ltd.'s stock.

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PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Oneida Ltd. respectfully petitions for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in this case.

OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the court of appeals (App., *infra*, 1a-7a) is reported at 562 F.3d 154. The opinion of the bankruptcy court (App., *infra*, 8a-38a) is reported at 383 B.R. 29. The appeal was taken directly from the bankruptcy court to the court of appeals under 28 U.S.C. § 158(d)(2)(A). The district court did not issue an opinion.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals was entered on April 8, 2009. A timely petition for rehearing was denied on July 14, 2009. App., *infra*, 39a. This Court has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

FEDERAL STATUTE INVOLVED

Section 1306(a)(7) of Title 29 of the United States Code provides in pertinent part as follows:

> **(7) Premium rate for certain terminated single-employer plans**
>
> **(A) In general**
>
> If there is a termination of a single-employer plan under clause (ii) or (iii) of section 1341(c)(2)(B) of this title or section 1342 of this title, there shall be payable to the corporation, with respect to each applicable 12-month period, a premium at a rate equal to $1,250 multiplied by the number of individuals who were participants in the plan immediately before the termination date. Such premium shall be in addition to any other premium under this section.
>
> **(B) Special rule for plans terminated in bankruptcy reorganization**
>
> In the case of a single-employer plan terminated under section 1341(c)(2)(B)(ii) of this title or under section 1342 of this title during pendency of any bankruptcy reorganization proceeding under chapter 11 of Title 11, or under any similar law of a State or a political subdivision of a State (or a case described in section 1341(c)(2)(B)(i) of this title filed by or against such person has been converted, as of such date, to such a case in

which reorganization is sought), subparagraph (A) shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of such person in such case.

STATEMENT

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (the "DRA") amended the Employee Retirement Income Security Act ("ERISA") to impose a premium (the "Termination Premium") in connection with the distress termination of a pension plan. The general rule imposes the Termination Premium "immediately before the termination date." 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(A); *supra* pp. 2. If a pension plan is terminated "during the pendency of any bankruptcy reorganization proceeding," however, the general rule "shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of such person in such case." 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B); *supra* pp. 2-3.

Petitioner Oneida Ltd. has been for many years the leading domestic designer and supplier of silver plated and stainless steel flatware (knives, forks, and spoons). Like many domestic manufacturers, Oneida suffered in recent years from intense foreign competition. Also like many domestic manufacturers, the company's legacy pension plans were underfunded. The underfunding triggered minimum funding contributions that threatened to consume all of the company's cash flow. To reorganize the company, Oneida Ltd. filed a petition under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code and proposed to discharge the contingent unsecured obligations of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (the "PBGC"), including the Termination Premiums.

On cross-motions for summary judgment, the bankruptcy court applied bankruptcy law to determine that the Termination Premiums constituted a

"claim" as defined in Section 101(5) of title 11 of the United States Code (the "Bankruptcy Code") that arose pre-petition and therefore was discharged pursuant to Section 1141(d) of the Bankruptcy Code upon Oneida Ltd.'s emergence from Chapter 11.

On direct appeal from the bankruptcy court, the court of appeals reversed and held that non-bankruptcy law—specifically, ERISA's special rule set forth in Section 1306(a)(7)(B) (*supra* pp. 2-3)—required that the Termination Premiums be deemed to arise after Oneida Ltd.'s discharge from bankruptcy.

A. The Dispute over Termination Premiums

Like many other domestic manufacturers, petitioner Oneida Ltd. suffered from intense competition in the early years of this decade from low-cost manufacturers based outside the United States. In response to that competition, the company focused on the design and distribution of flatware and outsourced its manufacturing in 2005. Meanwhile, in 2004, it had restructured outside of the bankruptcy court. App., *infra*, 9a. The out-of-court restructuring, however, failed sufficiently to recapitalize the company. In particular, the restructuring did not address the company's pension plans, which were underfunded by approximately $40 million. App., *infra*, 9a-10a. The underfunding triggered minimum funding contributions that threatened to consume all of the company's cash flow. App., *infra*, 10a.

After months of negotiations with the PBGC to effect distress terminations of its pension plans and reorganize under Chapter 11, on March 19, 2006, Oneida Ltd. and various domestic affiliates (collectively, "Oneida") filed voluntary petitions under Chapter 11 in the United States Bankruptcy Court

for the Southern District of New York. App., *infra*, 10a; C.A. App. A-948-49. After further negotiations with the PBGC, which preserved two of Oneida's three pension plans (C.A. App. A-152-54), Oneida filed an amended reorganization plan that proposed to discharge the contingent unsecured obligations to the PBGC relating to the remaining pension plan, including the Termination Premiums (C.A. App. A-907). After a hearing lasting several days, the bankruptcy court confirmed Oneida's amended reorganization plan. C.A. App. A-908.

B. The Bankruptcy Court's Decision

As part of the parties' agreement, Oneida and the PBGC reserved for later resolution the question whether Oneida's obligation to pay the Termination Premiums arising from the one pension plan that it terminated in Chapter 11 was a pre-petition "claim" under 11 U.S.C. § 101(5), in which event it was subject to compromise or discharge in Oneida's Chapter 11 plan, or whether the payment obligation arose after the confirmation date, in which event it was not discharged. C.A. App. A-908-09.

On cross-motions for summary judgment, the bankruptcy court concluded that "[u]nder any construction of the term ['claim,' 11 U.S.C. § 101(5)], the DRA [Termination] Premium in a Chapter 11 case is a classic contingent claim." App., *infra*, 20a. The bankruptcy court observed that, while an out-of-court reorganization results in a "fixed" claim for Termination Premiums payable one month after termination, an in-court reorganization leads to a claim for Termination Premiums that is "contingent" because it is enforceable only after the debtor receives a discharge or the Chapter 11 case (or analogous state proceed-

ing) is dismissed. App., *infra*, 21a. The bankruptcy court concluded that the claim arose pre-petition because of the pre-petition relationship between Oneida and the PBGC. "[A]ll of the relevant facts militate toward a finding that the 'claim' was in the parties' contemplation prior to the petition date." App., *infra*, 32a.

C. The Court of Appeals' Decision

On direct appeal from the bankruptcy court to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, the PBGC contended that "a pre-petition bankruptcy claim exists only if the claimant had a right to payment under the applicable non-bankruptcy law before the debtor filed the bankruptcy petition"—"the applicable non-bankruptcy law also governs ***when*** a bankruptcy claim arises." PBGC C.A. Br. 18 (emphasis PBGC's); *see id.* at 2, 4-5, 27.

The Second Circuit accepted the PBGC's contention and held that "[t]o make these determinations [of 'whether the claimant possessed a right to payment' and 'whether that right arose before the filing of the petition'] we look to the substantive non-bankruptcy law that gives rise to the debtor's obligation." App., *infra*, 4a-5a (internal citation omitted). The Second Circuit did not disturb the bankruptcy court's factual finding that the PBGC's claim for Termination Premiums "was in the parties' contemplation prior to the petition date." App., *infra*, 32a. Instead, it gave controlling effect to the characterization of that claim as "not apply[ing] to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal." App., *infra*, 5a (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B)).

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

This petition presents a fundamental question of bankruptcy law over which the circuit courts of appeals have been divided for the last quarter century—namely, does bankruptcy law control whether a contingent claim in a bankruptcy is a "pre-petition" claim subject to compromise and discharge or may non-bankruptcy law provide the rule of decision?

The Second Circuit held that non-bankruptcy law (here, ERISA as amended by the DRA) determined that Termination Premiums were not pre-petition claims and therefore were not dischargeable. App., *infra*, 4a-5a. The Second Circuit's reasoning—that non-bankruptcy law may dictate that a contingent claim is not pre-petition—is consistent with the twenty-five-year-old decision of the Third Circuit in *In re M. Frenville Co., Inc.*, 744 F.2d 332 (1984), on whose panel sat the late Associate Justice Potter Stewart (then retired). *Frenville* held that "the threshold question of when a right to payment arises, absent overriding federal law, 'is to be determined by reference to state law'" and a consideration of whether the right to payment could have been asserted under state law pre- or post-petition. *Id. at* 337 (citation omitted)).

The Third Circuit's decision in *Frenville* and the Second Circuit's decision below both conflict with decisions of six other circuit courts of appeals—specifically, the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits. Those circuits all hold that bankruptcy law alone controls whether a contingent claim is a pre-petition claim subject to discharge in bankruptcy. *See infra* pp. 10-11.

This Court should resolve the longstanding division among the circuit courts of appeals now to limit forum shopping and facilitate effective bankruptcy reorganizations. With the present circuit split, debtors with legacy underfunded pension plans (and no government bailout) have an enormous incentive to file for bankruptcy other than in the Second and Third Circuits, even if New York or Delaware (for example) would provide the most sensible forum. What is more, for debtors with substantial pension Termination Premium obligations who cannot file outside the Second and Third Circuits, the decision below that those obligations cannot be compromised or discharged may well mean the difference between a successful Chapter 11 reorganization and a Chapter 7 liquidation that destroys salvageable businesses and good manufacturing jobs.

I. THE SECOND CIRCUIT'S DECISION CONFLICTS WITH THE DECISIONS OF SIX OTHER CIRCUIT COURTS OF APPEALS

The Second Circuit's decision tracks the reasoning of the Third Circuit's decision in *In re M. Frenville Co., Inc.*, 744 F.2d at 337, and therefore conflicts with the decisions of six other circuit courts of appeals. Those six circuits look to bankruptcy law—specifically a pre-petition relationship test—to determine whether a claim is a pre-petition contingent obligation subject to discharge, regardless of whether non-bankruptcy law purports to define the claim as something other than pre-petition. Breaking with those decisions, and joining the Third Circuit, the Second Circuit below looked at substantive non-bankruptcy law not only to examine the nature of the claim and when it arose,

but also to borrow the label by which non-bankruptcy law characterized the claim—here, as post-petition.

A. The Third Circuit's *Frenville* Decision and the Second Circuit's Decision Below

"*Frenville* held that third-party claims for non-contractual contribution and indemnity filed after the date of the Chapter 11 petition are post-petition claims, not subject to the automatic stay, even though based on facts occurring pre-petition, if under state law the third-party claims may not be pleaded until the third-party plaintiff has been sued by the primary plaintiff and if the primary suit is filed post-petition." *In re Baldwin-United Corp. Litig.*, 765 F.2d 343, 346 (2d Cir. 1985). A claim can only be pre-petition under *Frenville* if an actual cause of action arose and could have been asserted before bankruptcy. *Frenville*, 744 F.2d at 337.

The Second Circuit's reasoning that the Termination Premiums here arose post-petition tracks *Frenville*'s logic precisely: "To make these determinations [of 'whether the claimant possessed a right to payment' and 'whether that right arose before the filing of the petition'] we look to the ***substantive non-bankruptcy law*** that gives rise to the debtor's obligation." App., *infra*, 4a-5a (internal citation omitted; emphasis added). Because Oneida's obligation to pay had not yet "arise[n]," *i.e.*, could not have been asserted before the bankruptcy filing, the Second Circuit held that the claim for Termination Premiums did not constitute a pre-petition claim subject to discharge under the Bankruptcy Code. *Id.*

B. The Decision of the Second Circuit Below Conflicts with Decisions of the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits

By adopting the reasoning of the Third Circuit in *Frenville*, the Second Circuit brought itself into conflict with the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits, all of which have expressly rejected *Frenville*. *See In re Parker*, 313 F.3d 1267, 1269-70 (10th Cir. 2002) ("We note . . . the Fourth Circuit's remark that it 'ha[s] found no court outside the Third Circuit which has followed the reasoning and holding of *Frenville*'. . . Pursuant to this reasoning, we hold that the malpractice claim here arose . . . prior to the filing of the debtor's petition.") (citation omitted); *Epstein v. Official Comm. of Unsec. Creditors*, 58 F.3d 1573, 1576 n.2 (11th Cir. 1995) ("This [*Frenville*] test since has been rejected by a majority of courts as imposing too narrow an interpretation on the term claim. . . . We agree. . . .") (citations omitted); *Butler v. Nationsbank, N.A.*, 58 F.3d 1022, 1029 (4th Cir. 1995) ("[W]e have explicitly declined to follow the reasoning of *Frenville*. . . .") (internal citation omitted); *Lemelle v. Universal Mfg. Corp.*, 18 F.3d 1268, 1275-77 (5th Cir. 1994); *In re Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific RR Co.*, 974 F.2d 775, 781-82, 786 (7th Cir. 1992); *In re Hassanally*, 208 B.R. 46, 51 (9th Cir. Bankr. App. Panel 1997) ("The Ninth Circuit and other circuits have rejected this [*Frenville*] test, under a variety of fact patterns, on the grounds that it interprets the term claim more narrowly than Congress intended.") (quoting, among other decisions, *In re Jensen*, 995 F.2d 925, 929 (9th Cir. 1993) ("to hold that a claim for contribution arises only when there is an enforceable right to payment

appears to ignore the breadth of the statutory definition of 'claim'")).

C. Despite Other Circuits' Criticism of the Third Circuit's *Frenville* Decision, the Conflict Persists and Has Now Been Deepened with the Addition of the Second Circuit's Decision Below

Although other circuits have disagreed with *Frenville*, the Third Circuit has adhered to it, the conflict thus persists, and the Second Circuit has now joined the Third Circuit. In *Jones v. Chemetron Corp.*, 212 F.3d 199, 205-06 (2000), the Third Circuit expressly adhered to *Frenville*:

> The parties dispute the correct standard for determining when the plaintiffs' claims arose. Chemetron contends that the question of when the plaintiffs' claims arose is not governed by state law dictating when a cause of action accrues, but rather by a federal common law of bankruptcy. Although significant authority supporting this proposition exists in other circuits, this circuit has held the reverse. In *Matter of M. Frenville Co., Inc.*, 744 F.2d 332 (3d Cir. 1984), *cert. denied*, 469 U.S. 1160, 105 S.Ct. 911, 83 L.Ed.2d 925 (1985), this court held that in most circumstances a "claim" arises for bankruptcy purposes at the same time the underlying state law cause of action accrues. *Id.* at 337. We are cognizant of the criticism the *Frenville* decision has engendered, but it remains the law of this circuit. *See Matter of Penn Central Transp. Co.*, 71 F.3d 1113, 1114-15 (3d Cir. 1995) (applying rule of *Frenville*), *cert. denied*, 517 U.S. 1221, 116 S.Ct. 1851, 134 L.Ed.2d 951 (1996); *In re Bryer*, 216 B.R. 755, 759 (Bankr. E.D. Pa. 1998) (same).

See also In re Bradley, No. 07-14607bf, 2008 WL 4065810, at *5 (Bankr. E.D. Pa. Aug. 26, 2008) ("Furthermore, the question of when a right of payment arises is answered in this circuit by state law, not by federal common law. *Matter of M. Frenville Co., Inc.*, 744 F.2d at 337 (analyzing New York law); *accord Jones v. Chemetron Corp.*, 212 F.3d 199, 205-06 (3d Cir. 2000)."); *In re W.R. Grace*, 281 B.R. 852, 860 (Bankr. D. Del. 2002) ("*Frenville* has proved a remarkably unpopular decision and no other Circuit Court of Appeals has followed it. It is widely read to posit an accrual test for bankruptcy claims, as distinguished from a conduct test under which only the conduct giving rise to liability must have occurred to give rise to a claim under the Code. *See Beeter v. Tri-City Prop. Mgmt. Servs., Inc.*, 173 B.R. 108, 118 (Bankr. W.D. Tex. 1994). *Frenville* remains the law of this Circuit, however, as affirmed in *Jones v. Chemetron Corp.*, 212 F.3d 199, 206 (3d Cir. 2000).").

D. This Case Provides an Appropriate Vehicle to Resolve the Persistent Conflict Among the Circuit Courts of Appeals

Applying bankruptcy law (in particular, the broad definition of "claim" in 11 U.S.C. § 101(5)) rather than non-bankruptcy law (ERISA, as amended by the DRA) to determine whether Termination Premiums are contingent pre-petition claims would reverse the judgment below and be outcome determinative of this case. The bankruptcy court's undisturbed factual finding is that the PBGC's claim for Termination Premiums "was in the parties' contemplation prior to the petition date." App., *infra*, 32a. Under bankruptcy law, it is well-settled that the pre-petition nature of Oneida's pension plans, Oneida's intention to effect distress terminations, Oneida's exposure to

Termination Premiums, and the parties' negotiations before Oneida's Chapter 11 filing all make the Termination Premiums, as the bankruptcy court found, a "classic contingent claim" under "any construction of the term." App., *infra*, 20a. The Second Circuit avoided that result only because it allowed "substantive non-bankruptcy law" to "make these determinations" of "whether the claimant possessed a right to payment" and "whether that right arose before the filing of the petition." App., *infra*, 4a-5a (internal citation omitted).

To be sure, the Second Circuit did not rely on the Third Circuit's *Frenville* decision by name. But its reasoning tracks *Frenville* precisely and the conflict raised by the panel's decision was brought to the Second Circuit's attention by Oneida's rehearing petition. *See* Oneida C.A. R'hrng. Pet. 1-15. Plenary consideration of this case would resolve this long-standing conflict among the circuit courts of appeals.

The suitability of this case as a vehicle to determine whether contingent pre-petition claims are determined by bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law is likewise unaffected by the fact that the "substantive non-bankruptcy law" (App., *infra*, 4a-5a) at issue in this case is federal law rather than state law or a private contract. Although the Second Circuit suggested that ERISA's special rule "might not control the question of whether a 'claim' existed" "in the context of a private contract" (App, *infra*, 5a), it offered no principle to distinguish between federal and non-federal non-bankruptcy law. For its part, the PBGC did not contend that the DRA impliedly amended the Bankruptcy Code. *See* App., *infra*, 24a-28a. In any event, implied amendment would conflict with this Court's clear-statement requirement for amendments to the Bankruptcy Code. *See United*

States v. Reorganized CF & I Fabricators of Utah, Inc., 518 U.S. 213, 219 (1996).

Because the Second Circuit's decision squarely presents the question whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law determines if a claim is subject to compromise or discharge in a bankruptcy proceeding, this case is an appropriate vehicle to resolve the quarter-century-long conflict among the circuit courts of appeals.

II. THIS COURT SHOULD RESOLVE THE LONG-STANDING CONFLICT NOW TO LIMIT FORUM SHOPPING AND FACILITATE EFFECTIVE BANKRUPTCY REORGANIZATIONS

The current recession has caused thousands of businesses to attempt to reorganize in bankruptcy court. If the conflict is allowed to persist, debtors will have enormous incentives to engage in forum shopping so as to reorganize in bankruptcy courts in circuits other than the Second and Third Circuits with the objective of including the broadest number of dischargeable contingent claims (*i.e.*, contingent claims that bankruptcy law would label as pre-petition) within the reach of those bankruptcy courts. For those debtors who lack the ability to shop for a forum outside the Second and Third Circuits, and who have substantial legacy underfunded pension plans, their ability to reorganize may be thwarted, salvageable businesses destroyed, and good manufacturing jobs lost because they cannot be reorganized under Chapter 11 and must be liquidated under Chapter 7 instead.

A. The Court of Appeals' Decision Below Encourages Forum Shopping

The Second Circuit's decision below and the Third Circuit's *Frenville* decision encourage potential debtors to shop for a bankruptcy court in another circuit. Absent review by this Court, potential debtors facing large Termination Premiums or other contingent claims that arguably arise post-petition under substantive non-bankruptcy law will have an overwhelming incentive to file Chapter 11 petitions in bankruptcy courts outside the Second and Third Circuits in order to avoid the decision that such claims are not subject to compromise or discharge in bankruptcy. Because a debtor may file a Chapter 11 petition in any judicial district in which it is incorporated, has its principal place of business, or has substantial assets, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1408, the potential for forum-shopping is real. *See* "GM, Chrysler Venue Hunting Ch. 11 Filings," TheDeal.com (Apr. 28, 2009) (the panel's decision here is "just another thing that argues for the automakers to stick close to home [i.e., file a Chapter 11 petition in Detroit] if a bankruptcy filing is in order"). The treatment of an enterprise and its employees in bankruptcy should not turn on whether the debtor can secure a forum outside New York or Delaware.

B. The Court of Appeals' Decision Below Threatens Effective Bankruptcy Reorganizations

Potential debtors facing large Termination Premiums who cannot file bankruptcy petitions outside the Second and Third Circuits may be denied the effective reorganization of their financial affairs and the fresh start promised by the Bankruptcy Code. The Second Circuit below expressly excluded pension

Termination Premiums from compromise in bankruptcy court and rendered them non-dischargeable. For debtors required to make substantial premium payments, the Second Circuit's holding may prevent successful reorganizations and force unnecessary liquidations.

If this Court does not grant review and the Second Circuit's decision stands, then companies which are looking to reorganize but can neither discharge the Termination Premiums in Chapter 11 (because of the decision below) nor pay the Termination Premiums after emerging from bankruptcy may have no alternative but to file for liquidation under Chapter 7. Perversely, the "special rule" thus encourages liquidations and the destruction of businesses and jobs. The heading and text of the special rule make clear that the Termination Premiums that accrue as of the date of discharge apply only in "bankruptcy reorganization" under "chapter 11 of Title 11," and not liquidations under Chapter 7. 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B).

In the current economic environment, Oneida is not the only debtor (or potential debtor) with substantial pension termination obligations. Other domestic manufacturers with large numbers of retirees and legacy underfunded pension plans will require adjustment of pension obligations in order to reorganize effectively in bankruptcy and emerge with sufficient capital to compete successfully in an extraordinarily difficult market. The Second Circuit's decision below will make that kind of reorganization nearly impossible and liquidation virtually inevitable for many of those companies. *See* Nell Hennessy, PBGC Termination Premium: the Bankruptcy Code v. ERISA, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS COMM. NEWSLETTER, n.p. (Dec. 2008) ("Even if PBGC is

successful in its arguments that ERISA trumps the Bankruptcy Code, there will be many cases in which the debtor cannot reorganize if it must pay the full termination premium."); John D. Penn, Post-Bankruptcy Pension Cost: Potential Jobs Killer, Law360 (May 14, 2009) ("This additional cost [of the Second Circuit's decision in this case], imposed on top of whatever must be paid to emerge from Chapter 11, could put companies into economic purgatory. They cannot continue in business with their pension plans in place and cannot afford to terminate the pension plans and reorganize their affairs. . . . [T]he only way to avoid paying the termination premium might be converting the case to a Chapter 7 liquidation. . . . The pension plan would eventually be terminated and the termination premium becomes a jobs killer that wipes out future employment in the process").

Although shoring up the federal pension insurance fund—the ostensible primary purpose of the DRA—is a worthwhile objective, the PBGC's claims are only one set of claims among many worthwhile claims that—before the Second Circuit's decision—were appropriately adjusted or discharged along with all other pre-petition claims in bankruptcy court. Pension Termination Premiums should remain subject to compromise and discharge in bankruptcy court.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

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October 9, 2009

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS, SECOND CIRCUIT

Docket No. 08-2964-bk

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,
Defendant-Appellant,

v.

ONEIDA LTD.,
Plaintiff-Appellee.

Argued: Jan. 29, 2009
Decided: April 8, 2009

Before: POOLER and LIVINGSTON, *Circuit Judges*, and RAKOFF, *District Judge*.*

RAKOFF, *District Judge*.

The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation ("PBGC") appeals from a judgment of the Bankruptcy Court, Southern District of New York (Allan L. Gropper, B.J.), which held that "Termination Premiums" created by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub.L. 109-171, 120 Stat. 4 (2006), are pre-petition contingent claims dischargeable in bankruptcy.[1] On May

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* The Honorable Jed S. Rakoff, United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York, sitting by designation.

[1] The provision of the Deficit Reduction Act creating the Termination Premiums amended the relevant provision of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act ("ERISA"), 29 U.S.C.

12, 2008, the parties jointly petitioned for permission to appeal directly from the bankruptcy court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 158(d)(2), which grants jurisdiction to the court to hear such an appeal when the question presented "involves a question of law as to which there is no controlling decision of the court of appeals for the circuit or of the Supreme Court of the United States, or involves a matter of public importance." On August 29, 2008, the Court granted the joint petition, *see Pension Benefit Guar. Corp. v. Oneida, Ltd.*, No. 08-2964-bk (2d Cir. Aug. 29, 2008), and the matter was subsequently briefed and argued. We now reverse.

The PBGC is essentially an insurer of pension funds. "Termination Premiums" paid to the PBGC are designed to help insure employees against the non-payment of pension benefits if the employer terminates a covered fund under specified circumstances. The "General Rule" is that

> [i]f there is a termination of a single-employer plan [under specified provisions], there shall be payable to the [PBGC], with respect to each applicable 12-month period, a premium at a rate equal to $1,250 multiplied by the number of individuals who were participants in the plan immediately before the termination date.

29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(A). If, however, the plan is terminated during a bankruptcy reorganization proceeding, then

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§ 1306. The provision was later permanently enacted as part of the Pension Protection Act of 2006, Pub.L. 109-280, 120 Stat. 780.

> [the General Rule] shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of [the employer] in such case.

Id. § 1306(a)(7)(B). This is called the "Special Rule."

Under the General Rule, the "applicable 12-month period" runs from the "first month following the month in which the termination date occurs" and requires payment for a total of three years. Under the Special Rule, the applicable 12-month period does not commence until "the first month following the month which includes the earliest date as of which each [employer] is discharged or dismissed" from the bankruptcy proceeding. *Id.* § 1306(a)(7)(C). It is thus apparent from the face of the relevant statutory provisions that "[i]n the case of termination due to reorganization, the liability for the [termination] premium *does not arise* until the employer is discharged from the reorganization proceeding." Staff of Joint Comm. on Taxation, 109th Cong. Technical Explanation of H.R. 4, the "Pension Protection Act of 2006," as Passed by the House on July 28, 2006, and as Considered by the Senate on August 3, 2006 (emphasis added).

On March 19, 2006, Oneida, a designer and manufacturer of flatware, filed for Chapter 11 reorganization in bankruptcy. *See Oneida Ltd. v. Pension Benefit Guar. Corp. (In re Oneida)*, 383 B.R. 29, 33 (Bankr.S.D.N.Y.2008). While in bankruptcy, Oneida terminated one of its single-employer, defined-benefit pension plans, the Oneida Plan, pursuant to a stipulation by the instant parties preserving their respective rights to dispute or enforce payment of Termination Premiums. Pension Settlement Agreement ¶ 5 (May 3, 2006). Oneida then sought a declaratory judgment that the applicable Termination

Premium was an unsecured, pre-petition bankruptcy claim under § 101(5) of the Bankruptcy Code. The parties cross-moved for summary judgment and the bankruptcy court issued an opinion on February 27, 2008, and an Amended Order on the Motions for Summary Judgment dated March 21, 2008, from which the PBGC now appeals. With no findings of fact in question, we review the bankruptcy court's conclusions of law *de novo*. *See Shugrue v. Air Line Pilots Ass'n. Int'l, (In re Ionosphere Clubs, Inc.)*, 922 F.2d 984, 988 (2d Cir.1990); *Gulf States Exploration Co. v. Manville Forest Prods. Corp. (In re Manville Forest Prods. Corp.)*, 896 F.2d 1384, 1388 (2d Cir.1990).

The bankruptcy court believed that the Termination Premiums were dischargeable pre-petition claims because of the broad definition accorded the term "claim" in the bankruptcy context. Specifically, the Bankruptcy Code defines "claim" as a "right to payment, whether or not such right is reduced to judgment, liquidated, unliquidated, fixed, contingent, matured, unmatured, disputed, undisputed, legal, equitable, secured, or unsecured." 11 U.S.C. § 101(5)(A). "Congress unquestionably expected this definition to have wide scope." *United States v. LTV Corp. (In re Chateaugay Corp.)*, 944 F.2d 997, 1003 (2d Cir.1991).

At the same time, however, the definition's reach is "not infinite." *LTV Steel Co. v. Shalala (In re Chateaugay Corp.)*, 53 F.3d 478, 497 (2d Cir.1995). Rather, "the existence of a valid bankruptcy claim depends on (1) whether the claimant possessed a right to payment, and (2) whether that right arose before the filing of the petition." *Id.* at 497; *see also In re Duplan Corp.*, 212 F.3d 144, 151 (2d Cir.2000). To make these determinations, we look to the substan-

tive non-bankruptcy law that gives rise to the debtor's obligation. *See Travelers Cas. & Sur. Co. of Am. v. Pac. Gas & Elec. Co.*, 549 U.S. 443, 450, 127 S.Ct. 1199, 167 L.Ed.2d 178 (2007) (noting that "creditors' entitlements in bankruptcy arise in the first instance from the underlying substantive law creating the debtor's obligation" (internal quotations omitted) (quoting *Raleigh v. Ill. Dept. of Revenue*, 530 U.S. 15, 20, 120 S.Ct. 1951, 147 L.Ed.2d 13 (2000))).

Here, the substantive, non-bankruptcy law giving rise to Oneida's obligation to pay a Termination Premium is the Special Rule, which unambiguously states that where a pension plan is terminated in connection with an employer's bankruptcy reorganization, the General Rule—which creates the PBGC's right to a Termination Premium—"shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of [the employer]." 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B). The obvious purpose of this rule is to prevent employers from evading the Termination Premium while seeking reorganization in bankruptcy. Although in the context of a private contract, this language might not control the question of whether a "claim" existed, Congress may prescribe when a claim will be legally effective for the purposes of the Bankruptcy Code, at least where, as here, the non-bankruptcy statute *explicitly* discusses how the obligation should be treated in bankruptcy.

This, then, is not a situation, as the bankruptcy court erroneously thought, where an obligation has already been created prior to bankruptcy but is subject to a contingency. *See In re Oneida*, 383 B.R. at 38-39. Rather, an employer's obligation to pay a Termination Premium on a pension plan that is terminated during the course of the bankruptcy does

not even arise until the bankruptcy itself is terminated. No matter how broadly the term "claim" is construed, it cannot extend to a right to payment that does not yet exist under federal law.

If there is any ambiguity in the statutory language of the Special Rule—and we perceive none—it is resolved in the PBGC's favor by the legislative history of the Deficit Reduction Act and the Pension Protection Act. The Termination Premiums were established in response to mounting financial pressure on the PBGC as a result of an increasing number of pension plan terminations. *See* H.R. Rep. 109-276, at 345-48 (2005).[2] Congress recognized, however, that its Termination Premium program could be jeopardized by employers seeking bankruptcy protection. It thus created the Special Rule. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce stated:

> [T]he Committee believes that a termination premium for former plan sponsors who initiate and complete a distress termination while in bankruptcy is appropriate. The bankruptcy courts should not be used as a mechanism for eliminating the burden of an underfunded pension plan; therefore, an additional premium paid to the PBGC to recognize the agency's assumption of unfunded plan liabilities is reasonable.

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[2] The 109th Congress considered the Termination Premiums in two budget reconciliation bills, H.R. 4241, 109th Cong. (2005) and S. 1932, 109th Cong. (2005), and two pension reform bills, H.R. 2830 (Pension Protection Act of 2005), 109th Cong. (2005), (which was the predecessor to the bill passed in 2006), and S. 1783 (Pension Security and Transparency Act), 109th Cong. (2005), (which was later reconciled with H.R. 2830 to include termination premiums).

H.R.Rep. No. 109-276, at 348. Treating the Special Rule's Termination Premium as a pre-petition claim would therefore directly thwart Congress's aim in establishing the Special Rule.

For the foregoing reasons, the decision of the bankruptcy court is hereby reversed and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this ruling.

APPENDIX B

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT,
S.D. NEW YORK

Bankruptcy No. 06-10489 (ALG)
Adversary No. 06-01920 (ALG)

In re ONEIDA LTD., Reorganized Debtor.
ONEIDA LTD.,
Plaintiff,

v.

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,
Defendant.

Feb. 27, 2008

MEMORANDUM OF OPINION

ALLAN L. GROPPER, *Bankruptcy Judge*.

On February 8, 2006, the President signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 ("DRA"), an appropriations bill designed to reduce the deficit in connection with the 2006 fiscal-year budget. One section of this legislation (the "DRA Amendment") amended the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA") to create an additional premium for pension plans terminated as part of an in- or out-of-court restructuring. The premium ("DRA Premium") was payable to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation ("PBGC"), a private governmental corporation that was established to collect premiums from pension plan sponsors and to insure certain plan payments.

Oneida Ltd. ("Oneida" or "Debtor") and several affiliates filed petitions under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code on March 19, 2006, a few weeks after passage of the DRA. Having confirmed a Plan of Reorganization on August 30, 2006 (the "Plan"), Oneida commenced this declaratory judgment action, seeking a finding that the DRA Premiums are prepetition "claims" discharged by the Plan. The PBGC argues that DRA Premiums are not "claims" in the Chapter 11 case and were not discharged; alternatively, it contends that the Debtor is estopped from refusing to pay the DRA Premiums in full. For the reasons set forth below, the Court finds that the DRA Premiums are prepetition "claims" that were discharged in the Plan and that there is no occasion to apply the doctrine of estoppel against the Debtor.

BACKGROUND

Oneida was formed in 1880 in Oneida, New York and became a leading designer and manufacturer of flatware. Facing challenges from overseas manufacturers, Oneida transitioned its operations from manufacturing and became wholly outsourced, with a focus on design and distribution. In 2004, it completed an out-of-court restructuring. Its senior lenders agreed to exchange their secured debt for 62% of Oneida's common stock and entered into a new credit agreement, which provided for approximately $235 million in new loans secured by first priority liens on nearly all of Oneida's assets. (Second Amended Disclosure Statement ("Disc. St."), ECF# 245, p. 15.)[1] In the Debtor's view, however, the 2004 restructuring

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[1] References to ECF numbers are to the docket in the main case, Case No. 06-10489(ALG), not the separate docket for this adversary proceeding.

"did not appropriately recapitalize the Company." (Disc. St., p. 18.) On March 19, 2006, Oneida and several subsidiaries filed bankruptcy petitions, along with a proposed disclosure statement and pre-negotiated plan of reorganization.

The Debtor's proposed plan and disclosure statement were based on the premise that Oneida was insolvent and that application of the bankruptcy priorities would leave no value for its unsecured creditors or for its old equity. However, at the time of the filing, it appeared that Oneida had virtually no unsecured debt other than a substantial potential obligation to the PBGC. It had also come to an agreement with the PBGC relating to its pension obligations and the secured and unsecured liabilities resulting from the underfunding of its three tax-qualified single-employer defined-benefit pension plans—the Oneida Plan, the Buffalo China Salaried Plan, and the Buffalo China Union Plan. These plans were underfunded by about $40 million, triggering minimum contributions to fund the deficiency. There was never a dispute that, in Oneida's words, "unless the Oneida Pension Plans [were] terminated, those minimum contribution obligations would subsume all or virtually all of the Debtors' projected cash flow . . ." (Disc. St., p. 21.) Accordingly, Oneida and the PBGC had negotiated over the pension obligations and in an agreement that the parties never disavowed, Oneida had agreed to provide the PBGC with a promissory note in the principal amount of $3 million for the PBGC's secured claim; this note also covered "any unsecured claim it would have arising out of the distress termination of certain of the Debtors' pension

plans." *In re Oneida, Ltd.*, 351 B.R. 79, 82 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2006).[2]

The Debtor's agreement to provide the PBGC with a $3 million note was premised on termination of all three pension plans. On the petition date, Oneida filed a motion for an order finding that it had satisfied the financial requirements for distress termination of these plans, as set forth in 29 U.S.C. § 1341(c)(2)(B)(ii)(IV), and approving termination of the plans. After further negotiations between the Debtor and the PBGC, on April 27, 2006, the application was withdrawn for the Buffalo China Salaried and Union Plans. These plans were not terminated, although the Debtors reserved the right to move to do so in the future. On May 2, 2006, the Court entered an order granting the Debtor's uncontested motion to terminate the Oneida Plan.

The PBGC and Oneida thereafter reached an agreement, dated May 3, 2006, containing the specifics of the PBGC's claims arising from termination of the Oneida pension plan, in effect finalizing their prepetition agreement, and the Debtor filed a motion under Bankruptcy Rule 9019 for court approval thereof. The settlement agreement continued to provide the PBGC with a $3 million note. It was also agreed that "nothing contained [in the Settlement Agreement] or in the Plan of Reorganization will be

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[2] References are to the Court's opinion on confirmation of the Oneida Plan. During the contested confirmation hearing, the PBGC's unsecured claims were valued by stipulation at $21,075,050, but the Debtors and the PBGC "asserted the claim could be as high as $56,237,000." *Oneida*, 351 B.R. at 82. The PBGC's secured claim was based on the liens that the PBGC had obtained prepetition for earlier missed minimum funding contributions and was valued at approximately $2.7 million.

deemed to: (i) prejudice, preclude or otherwise affect any rights or obligations any of the Parties may have in connection with any premiums arising under Section 8101 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 . . ." (Settlement Agreement, ECF# 211, Exh. A.) The Settlement Agreement was never formally approved because of the objection of an Equity Committee that had appeared in the case and objected to that part of the settlement that recited that the PBGC had a $56,236,900 unsecured claim. (Objection of Equity Comm., ECF# 300.) The Equity Committee, claiming there was value for equity, argued that it was unfairly shut out and that an unreasonably high unsecured claim allocated to the PBGC would prejudice its position.

There were continuing disputes as to the amount of the PBGC claim.[3] Eventually, all parties stipulated that the claim was *at least* $21,075,050. (ECF# 342.) In any event, after a contested confirmation hearing in late July 2006, the Court found that there was no value for equity, that the Plan satisfied the absolute priority provisions of the Bankruptcy Code and that it could be "crammed down" against the equity.[4] *Oneida*, 351 B.R. at 94. The plan was confirmed by order dated August 30, 2006 and became effective on September 15, 2006.

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[3] For example, the Debtors filed an expert report on June 9, 2006, that opined that the PBGC Termination Claim aggregated $49,965,000. ECF # 273.

[4] The PBGC appeared throughout the confirmation process. The PBGC also made it clear that its agreement to accept a $3 million note and no specific distribution on its unsecured claim only applied to the pre-negotiated plan and could not be transposed to a plan that provided value to a junior class, the equity.

After confirmation, the Debtor and the PBGC entered into another stipulation, approved by the Court following a hearing on October 26, 2006, relating to claims arising from termination of the Oneida Pension Plan. The order (ECF # 443) had a specific provision relating to the PBGC's claims under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, stating:

> ¶ 5. Nothing contained in this Stipulation, the Disclosure Statement (or any supplements thereto), the Plan of Reorganization (or any supplements thereto), and the Confirmation Order, shall prejudice, preclude or otherwise affect any rights, obligations or arguments Oneida or the PBGC may have to challenge or enforce the validity of the DRA Provision, including, without limitation, the requirement to pay the DRA Premiums.

Shortly after the Court entered the October 26th order, the Debtor commenced this declaratory action, seeking a finding that the DRA Premiums are prepetition claims that were satisfied, along with all other PBGC claims, by the $3 million note and were otherwise discharged in Oneida's Plan. The PBGC contended that the DRA Premiums were not "claims" and accordingly were not discharged at confirmation. The parties nevertheless agreed that the DRA premiums would be paid into an escrow account while the issue was litigated. The PBGC also moved in the District Court to withdraw the reference, on the premise (i) that this case required "consideration of both title 11 and other laws of the United States regulating organizations or activities affecting interstate commerce" (mandatory withdrawal) or, alternatively, (ii) on the basis of discretionary withdrawal of the reference. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 157(d). In a decision

dated July 18, 2007, the District Court declined to withdraw the reference, finding that to resolve the dispute, "the Bankruptcy Court will be required to do what it does on a routine basis: determine whether the DRA Premiums are post-petition obligations that must be paid by Oneida upon reorganization, or pre-petition 'claims' that may be discharged pursuant to the Plan of Reorganization." *Oneida Ltd. v. Pension Ben. Guar. Corp.*, 372 B.R. 107, 111 (S.D.N.Y. 2007). It is to this determination that the Court now turns.

DISCUSSION

Both parties have moved for summary judgment. In accordance with Bankruptcy Rule 7056, which incorporates Fed.R.Civ.P. 56, summary judgment may be granted "if the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law." Fed.R.Civ.P. 56(c); *see Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322, 106 S.Ct. 2548, 91 L.Ed.2d 265 (1986); *Morenz v. Wilson-Coker*, 415 F.3d 230, 234 (2d Cir. 2005). The fact that both parties have moved for summary judgment does not establish that there are no material facts in dispute. *See Morales v. Quintel Entm't, Inc.*, 249 F.3d 115, 121 (2d Cir. 2001); *MG Ref. & Mktg., Inc. v. Knight Enters.*, 25 F.Supp.2d 175, 180 (S.D.N.Y. 1998). However, the record before the Court reveals no disputed issue of material fact.

Oneida argues that DRA Premiums are "claims" as defined in § 101(5) of the Bankruptcy Code, and were therefore discharged by its Reorganization Plan

pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 1141.[5] The PBGC argues that DRA Premiums are not "claims" under the Bankruptcy Code and were not discharged. The PBGC also argues, for the first time, that the Court should estop the Debtor from claiming that the DRA Premiums were discharged as a consequence of representations made by Oneida's Chief Financial Officer at the confirmation hearing. The Court will consider each of these arguments in turn.

I. THE TREATMENT OF DRA PREMIUMS UNDER THE BANKRUPTCY CODE

As the District Court found in its opinion refusing to withdraw the reference, "In 2006, facing a severe deficit in PBGC's funds, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which, among other things, amended ERISA to add a premium (the 'DRA Premium') to be paid by companies that terminate covered pension plans (the 'DRA Amendment')." 372 B.R. at 108. Codified at 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7), the DRA Amendment creates a special premium for pension plans terminated by companies in reorganization proceedings. The first part of the DRA Amendment reads, in relevant part:

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[5] By the Plan's terms, on the effective date (September 15, 2006), "Specified Unsecured Claims will be discharged and each Holder thereof shall not receive any distribution or property on account of its Specified Unsecured Claim." (Plan, ECF# 329, § 3.3(g)(i).) The term "Specified Unsecured Claim" is defined to include the aggregate of the "Unsecured PBGC Claims." (Plan, § 1.1.) The term "Unsecured PBGC Claims" "means the aggregate amount owed to the PBGC in connection with the distressed termination of the Pension Plans including pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §§ 1341(c)(2)(B)(ii), as amended . . . " (Plan, § 1.1.) Other sections of the Plan allocate the PBGC a $3 million Note for its secured claims. (Plan, §§ 3.3, 1.1.)

> (A) In general
>
> If there is a termination of a single-employer plan under clause (ii) or (iii) of section 1341(c)(2)(B) of this title or section 1342 of this title, there shall be payable to the [PBGC], with respect to each applicable 12-month period, a premium at a rate equal to $1,250 multiplied by the number of individuals who were participants in the plan immediately before the termination date. Such premium shall be in addition to any other premium under this section.

Clause (ii) of § 1341(c)(2)(B), referenced in § 1306(a)(7)(A), refers to companies that reorganize in court, either under the Bankruptcy Code or analogous State law relating to insolvency, and clause (iii) refers to out-of-court restructurings. Section 1342, which is also cross-referenced, authorizes the PBGC to terminate a pension plan on its own initiative.

Subsection (B) of the DRA Amendment then creates a rule that applies only in reorganization cases under bankruptcy law. It reads in full:

> (B) Special rule for plans terminated in bankruptcy reorganization
>
> In the case of a single-employer plan terminated under section 1341(c)(2)(B)(ii) of this title or under section 1342 of this title during pendency of any bankruptcy reorganization proceeding under chapter 11 of Title 11, or under any similar law of a State or a political subdivision of a State (or a case described in section 1341(c)(2)(B)(i) of this title filed by or against such person has been converted, as of such date, to such a case in which reorganization is sought), subparagraph

(A) shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of such person in such case.

Subsection (C) defines the term "applicable 12-month period" differently for in—and out-of-court reorganizations as follows:

(C) Applicable 12-month period

For purposes of subparagraph (A)—

(i) In general

The term "applicable 12-month period" means—

(I) the 12-month period beginning with the first month following the month in which the termination date occurs, and

(II) each of the first two 12-month periods immediately following the period described in subclause (I).

(ii) Plans terminated in bankruptcy reorganization

In any case in which the requirements of subparagraph (B) are met in connection with the termination of the plan with respect to 1 or more persons described in such subparagraph, the 12-month period described in clause (i)(I) shall be the 12-month period beginning with the first month following the month which includes the earliest date as of which each such person is discharged or dismissed in the case described in such clause in connection with such person.

The plain words of the statute demonstrate the following. First, under subsection (A), whenever an employer terminates a single-employer plan under ERISA's distress termination provisions in connec-

tion with a reorganization, whether inside or outside of bankruptcy, it is liable for a special DRA Premium calculated as of the termination date. Second, under subsection (B), when termination takes place in a Chapter 11 proceeding or an analogous proceeding under State law, the obligation to pay the DRA Premium is deemed to arise upon the date of discharge, which is usually the effective date of the plan of reorganization.[6] Third, under subsection (C), the DRA Premium is due at different times for cases in and out-of-court. For cases out-of-court, the Premium is due following the month after pension plan termination; for cases in-court, the Premium is due following the month after discharge.

Is the DRA Premium a Claim?

The principal question before the Court is whether the DRA Premium is a "claim" as defined in the Bankruptcy Code. Section 101(5)(A) of the Bankruptcy Code defines the term "claim" as a "right to payment, whether or not such right is reduced to judgment, liquidated, unliquidated, fixed, contingent, matured, unmatured, disputed, undisputed, legal, equitable, secured, or unsecured."[7] As the Supreme Court has repeatedly held, Congress intended the term "claim" to have "the broadest available defini-

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[6] Discharge in a Chapter 11 reorganization occurs upon entry of a Confirmation Order, "except as otherwise provided in this subsection, in the plan, or in the order confirming the plan." 11 U.S.C. § 1141(d)(1). In this case, the discharge was operative on the Effective Date of the Plan, September 15, 2006. Plan, § 12.3; Confirmation Order, ECF# 387, ¶ 40, 41.

[7] Section 101(5)(B) supplies a second definition of the term "claim" where the liability is based on an equitable remedy, but neither party in this case contends that the DRA Premiums give rise to an equitable remedy.

tion." *Johnson v. Home State Bank*, 501 U.S. 78, 83, 111 S.Ct. 2150, 115 L.Ed.2d 66 (1991); *see also FCC v. NextWave Pers. Commc'ns Inc.*, 537 U.S. 293, 302-3, 123 S.Ct. 832, 154 L.Ed.2d 863 (2003); *Pennsylvania Dep't of Public Welfare v. Davenport*, 495 U.S. 552, 558, 110 S.Ct. 2126, 109 L.Ed.2d 588 (1990).

The Second Circuit has also frequently described the term "claim" as expansive in scope, noting that the definition of "claim" in the Bankruptcy Code "replaced the far narrower concept of claim allowance established in the Bankruptcy Act of 1898." *In re Manville Forest Prods. Corp.*, 209 F.3d 125, 128 (2d Cir.2000); *see also United States v. LTV Corp.* (*In re Chateaugay Corp.*), 944 F.2d 997, 1003 (2d Cir.1991) (hereinafter "*Chateaugay I*"). The prior Bankruptcy Act provided that only "provable claims" could participate in the distribution of estate assets, and it thereby excluded liabilities of an uncertain and unliquidated nature. The philosophy of the 1978 Bankruptcy Code was to admit all possible liabilities and thereby treat creditors equitably as well as provide debtors with a more comprehensive discharge. *See Pearl-Phil GMT* (*Far East*) *Ltd. v. Caldor Corp.*, 266 B.R. 575, 581 (S.D.N.Y.2001) ("The Bankruptcy Code's more inclusive definition of a claim makes perfect sense in light of the Code's design to provide for a comprehensive discharge of liabilities so that the debtor may reorganize effectively.").

The "broadest available" definition of "claim" in § 101(5)(A) includes a right to payment that is "contingent" and "unmatured." "It is generally agreed that a debt is contingent if it does not become an obligation until the occurrence of a future event." *In re Mazzeo*, 131 F.3d 295, 303 (2d Cir. 1997). Thus, the fact that a right to payment is subject to one or more con-

tingencies, such as a pension plan termination or a Chapter 11 discharge, does not remove the right to payment from the definition of "claim." As the Second Circuit has stated, by including the term "contingent" in the definition of a "claim," Congress "gave the term claim a broad definition and 'contemplate[d] that all legal obligations of the debtor, no matter how remote or contingent, will be able to be dealt with in the bankruptcy case.'" *Chateaugay I*, 944 F.2d at 1003, quoting H.R. Rep. No. 95-595, at 309 (1978), U.S. Code Cong. & Admin. News 1978, pp. 5963, 6266.

If there is a dispute relating to the allowance of a contingent claim, it may be necessary for the Court, as part of the process of valuing the claim, to determine the probability that the contingency will occur. Bankruptcy courts routinely perform this analysis in connection with the allowance or disallowance of claims. *See Matter of Xonics Photochemical, Inc.*, 841 F.2d 198, 200 (7th Cir. 1988) ("To value the contingent liability it is necessary to discount it by the probability that the contingency will occur and the liability become real."); 4 COLLIER ON BANKRUPTCY ¶ 502.03[1][a] (15th ed. rev.2007). Indeed, the court has explicit power under § 502(c) of the Bankruptcy Code to estimate certain claims. *See O'Neill v. Continental Airlines, Inc.* (*Matter of Continental Airlines*), 981 F.2d 1450, 1461 (5th Cir.1993) ("In order for the estimation process of § 502(c) to apply, a claim must be contingent or unliquidated and fixing the claim must entail undue delay in the administration of justice."). However, there can be no dispute that contingent claims are "claims" as defined in the Bankruptcy Code.

Under any construction of the term, the DRA Premium in a Chapter 11 case is a classic contingent claim. Where the pension plan is terminated in an

out-of-court reorganization, the "claim" is fixed. Where the reorganization takes place in connection with a Chapter 11 case, it is contingent and becomes enforceable only after the debtor receives a discharge or the court case is dismissed. However, the DRA Amendment creates a liability to the PBGC—a claim—for all companies that effect a distress termination of a covered pension plan during a reorganization proceeding. It is only the "special rule" for in-court reorganizations that makes this claim contingent. In any event, there is not very much that is contingent about the DRA Premium liability in the Chapter 11 context. The statute provides that the claim will arise at the time the debtor obtains a discharge or at the time the case is dismissed—and one or the other of these must occur if a debtor has filed a petition under Chapter 11.[8] The only real uncertainty (contingency) is the number of workers who will be employed on the date for calculating the claim. Nevertheless, that amount can easily be estimated based on the facts of record at the time of the confirmation hearing or even later, as claim issues do not have to be resolved at the time of confirmation so long as plan feasibility is not implicated. *See In re Adelphia Bus. Solutions, Inc.*, 341 B.R. 415, 423 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2003); *In re MacDonald*, 128 B.R. 161, 167-68 (Bankr.W.D.Tex. 1991).

Despite the fact that the DRA Premium bears all the indicia of a classic contingent claim in a Chapter 11 case, the PBGC argues that the DRA Premium is

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[8] If a corporate debtor liquidates in Chapter 11, it does not obtain a discharge. 11 U.S.C. § 1141(d)(3)(A). However, in that case, it no longer undergoes a reorganization, there are no employees in the post-confirmation period, and the DRA Amendment does not appear to have any application at all.

not a "claim" because the obligation to pay does not become enforceable prior to the effective date of a Chapter 11 discharge. Because the definition of "claim" includes the words "unliquidated," "contingent," and "unmatured," a plain reading of § 101(5)(A) tells us that a "claim" includes a right to payment which is not presently enforceable. It is well accepted that "a party may have a bankruptcy claim and not possess a cause of action on that claim." *Kilbarr Corp. v. Gen. Servs. Admin. Office* (*In re Remington Rand Corp.*), 836 F.2d 825, 832 (3d Cir. 1988); *see also In re Cool Fuel, Inc.*, 210 F.3d 999, 1006 (9th Cir. 2000); 11 U.S.C. § 502(b)(1) (claim shall be allowed "except to the extent that . . . such claim is unenforceable against the debtor, under any agreement or applicable law for any reason *other than because such claim is contingent* or unmatured") (emphasis added). Whether there is a right to payment under non-bankruptcy law does not answer the question whether there is a Bankruptcy Code "claim." The PBGC is correct that non-bankruptcy law, in this case ERISA, governs issues such as the liquidated value of, enforceability of, or defenses to the right to payment. Bankruptcy law, however, governs whether a claim exists under the Bankruptcy Code and if so, whether such claim arose pre- or post-petition. As the Second Circuit has held, "Whether a claim exists is determined by bankruptcy law." *Manville Forest*, 209 F.3d at 128.

Pension liabilities have frequently been held to be "claims" within the definition of the Bankruptcy Code. *See Trustees of Amalgamated Ins. Fund v. McFarlin's, Inc.*, 789 F.2d 98, 103-4 (2d Cir. 1986) (withdrawal liability is not an administrative expense but prepetition claim); *In re Art Shirt Ltd., Inc.*, 93 B.R. 333, 338 (E.D. Pa. 1988) (withdrawal liability considered a debt for purposes of determining insol-

vency); *Amalgamated Ins. Fund v. William B. Kessler, Inc.*, 55 B.R. 735, 738-40 (S.D.N.Y.1985) (withdrawal liability not an administrative expense because it accrued prior to filing for bankruptcy); *In re Crane Rental Co., Inc.*, 334 B.R. 73, 76-77 (Bankr. D. Mass. 2005) (withdrawal liability is a prepetition claim); *In re CD Realty Partners*, 205 B.R. 651, 659 (Bankr. D. Mass. 1997) (same); *In re Westmoreland Coal Co.*, 213 B.R. 1, 15 (Bankr. D. Colo. 1997) (plan trustees hold an unmatured, unliquidated claim for future pre-funding premiums); *In re Great Northeastern Lumber & Millwork Corp.*, 64 B.R. 426, 428 (Bankr. E.D. Pa. 1986) (withdrawal liability not entitled to administrative priority); *In re Pulaski Highway Exp., Inc.*, 57 B.R. 502, 507 (Bankr. M.D. Tenn. 1986) (liability and amount may be contingent and unliquidated, but "such uncertainties do not defeat the existence of pre-petition claims for benefits which accrued prior to withdrawal"); *In re Silver Wheel Freightlines, Inc.*, 57 B.R. 476, 478 (Bankr. D. Or. 1985) (withdrawal liability contingent prepetition claim).

CPT Holdings v. Indust. & Allied Employees Union, 162 F.3d 405 (6th Cir.1998), on which the PBGC relies, is distinguishable. In that case, the debtor's plan was confirmed in January 1993, but it did not terminate its pension plan obligations until over a year later, in October 1994. The debtor had made post-confirmation payments for some time before withdrawing from the pension plans. The Court noted that "if [debtors] want their withdrawal liability discharged, they must completely withdraw from the plan prior to confirmation." *Id.* at 409. *See also In re United Merchs. & Mfrs., Inc.*, 166 B.R. 234 (Bankr. D. Del. 1994), where there was no withdrawal before confirmation. In this case, the pension plan was

terminated prior to confirmation and liability accrued as a consequence.

The PBGC offers no authority for the proposition that the breadth of the term "claim" in the Bankruptcy Code can be limited by a provision that the claim does not arise until "after" the effective date of a plan. Private parties could not accomplish this by a contractual provision that provided that damages would be payable only after a bankruptcy discharge. Such a provision would permit parties to a contract to create a new priority for themselves and circumvent the provisions of the Bankruptcy Code by the simple expedient of providing that the debt did not accrue until after bankruptcy proceedings had terminated. This type of provision would be a far more egregious version of the "springing lien" that is deemed to come into existence on a filing in bankruptcy and that was expressly banned by the Bankruptcy Code.[9] Similarly, a State could not create a liability that was deferred until—or came into existence on—the effective date of a Chapter 11 plan. Such a provision would permit any State to circumvent the discharge provided for in the Bankruptcy Code and effectively create a new priority—indeed, a new nondischargeable debt. *See, e.g., Int'l Brotherhood of Teamsters v. Kitty Hawk Int'l, Inc.* (*In re Kitty Hawk, Inc.*), 255 B.R. 428, 438-39 (Bankr. N.D. Tex. 2000).

Even though the Debtor raised the issue, the PBGC does not contend that Congress in effect granted it a

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[9] A "springing lien" is a provision that gives a creditor a priority right to payment on the occurrence of a condition such as the debtor's bankruptcy or insolvency. Such provisions are barred by the Bankruptcy Code. §§ 363(*l*), 541(c)(1)(B); *see Matter of Railway Reorganization Estate, Inc.*, 133 B.R. 578, 582-83 (Bankr. D. Del. 1991).

new nondischargeable prepetition claim by virtue of the DRA Amendment. Nor could it sustain such a contention, which would require the Court to find that Congress thereby repealed or amended the Bankruptcy Code. There is a strong presumption that a later law does not impliedly repeal or amend an established law such as the Bankruptcy Code. *Nat'l Ass'n of Home Builders v. Defenders of Wildlife*,—U.S. __, __, 127 S.Ct. 2518, 2532, 168 L.Ed.2d 467 (2007); *Morton v. Mancari*, 417 U.S. 535, 551, 94 S.Ct. 2474, 41 L.Ed.2d 290 (1974).[10] The presumption against implied amendment or repeal is even stronger where, as here, the potentially repealing measure was enacted in an appropriations bill. *See United States v. Will*, 449 U.S. 200, 221-22, 101 S.Ct. 471, 66 L.Ed.2d 392 (1980); *Tennessee Valley Auth. v. Hill*, 437 U.S. 153, 190, 98 S.Ct. 2279, 57 L.Ed.2d 117 (1978); *Auburn Housing Auth. v. Martinez*, 277 F.3d 138, 144 (2d Cir. 2002); *Calloway v. District of Columbia*, 216 F.3d 1, 9-10 (D.C. Cir. 2000).

The presumption against implied amendment or repeal can be overcome only under limited circumstances. *Nat'l Ass'n of Home Builders*, 127 S.Ct. at 2532. One ground is that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the earlier and later-enacted statutes. *Id.* The PBGC has made no effort to support the proposition that the DRA Amendment and the Bankruptcy Code are irreconcilable. It cannot and does not

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[10] This rule applies to statutes that would amend as well as repeal established law. As the Supreme Court said in *Nat'l Ass'n of Home Builders*, 127 S.Ct. at 2533, n. 8, "Every amendment of a statute effects a partial repeal to the extent that the new statutory command displaces earlier, inconsistent commands, and we have repeatedly recognized that implied amendments are no more favored than implied repeals."

argue that Congress left it with nothing if it is afforded a contingent unsecured claim for the DRA Premium. Reconciliation of the statutes affords the PBGC an unsecured claim based on the contingent liability of the DRA Premiums.[11] To adopt the PBGC's position, on the other hand, the Court would have to find that Congress amended the Bankruptcy Code and created a new nondischargeable debt for the benefit of the PBGC by virtue of the DRA Amendment.

Nor does the PBGC contend that there exists a "clear and manifest" intent of Congress to amend the Bankruptcy Code. *Nat'l Ass'n of Home Builders*, 127 S.Ct. at 2532; *see also Morton*, 417 U.S. at 551, 94 S.Ct. 2474; *Regional Rail Reorganization Act Cases*, 419 U.S. 102, 134, 95 S.Ct. 335, 42 L.Ed.2d 320 (1974). No such intent is evident from the DRA Amendment; for example, there is no legislative directive to deny discharge of the DRA Premiums notwithstanding any other applicable law. *See Lockhart v. United States*, 546 U.S. 142, 149, 126 S.Ct. 699, 163 L.Ed.2d 557 (2005) (Scalia, J., concurring). There is no direction that the DRA Premium not be considered a claim under the Bankruptcy Code.[12]

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[11] This liability was eliminated under the unique facts of the PBGC's express agreement in this case, but this happenstance, premised on Oneida's insolvency and the amount of debt owed to its secured creditors, does not establish that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the DRA Amendment and the Bankruptcy Code.

[12] Other bases for implied repeal exist but are inapplicable to this case. *See Branch v. Smith*, 538 U.S. 254, 274, 123 S.Ct. 1429, 155 L.Ed.2d 407 (2003) (later act covers the whole substance of the earlier one and is "clearly intended as a substitute") (internal citation omitted); *McHugh v. Rubin*, 220 F.3d 53, 58 (2d Cir. 2000) (defunding suspends operation of a statute).

In *PBGC v. CF & I Fabricators of Utah, Inc.* (*In re CF & I Fabricators of Utah*), 150 F.3d 1293 (10th Cir.1998), *cert. denied*, 526 U.S. 1145, 119 S.Ct. 2020, 143 L.Ed.2d 1032 (1999), the question before the Court was whether the fact that an ERISA statute called a liability a "tax" was conclusive as to whether the exactment "must be treated as taxes and accorded tax priority under the Bankruptcy Code." 150 F.3d at 1296. The Court found that the language of the ERISA statute was not conclusive because it was not sufficiently "explicit" that Congress intended to amend the Bankruptcy Code and provide the PBGC with the priority afforded to tax claims. It cited the decision of the Supreme Court in *United States v. Reorganized CF & I Fabricators of Utah, Inc.* (*In re CF & I Fabricators*), 518 U.S. 213, 116 S.Ct. 2106, 135 L.Ed.2d 506 (1996), and stated, "As we read the [Supreme] Court's analysis, the key to whether a statutory provision is 'explicit' in this context is whether the *Bankruptcy Code* adopts and makes specific reference to the provisions of the other law." 150 F.3d at 1297 (emphasis in original).[13] The DRA Amendment also fails the test of explicitness, as the Bankruptcy Code does not adopt or make any reference to the DRA Premiums, despite the fact that only a few months before the adoption of the DRA Amendment, Congress had amended the Bankruptcy Code to create several new nondischargeable debts.[14]

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[13] In *In re CF & I Fabricators*, 518 U.S. at 219-20, 116 S.Ct. 2106, the Supreme Court took note of the fact that the Bankruptcy Code contains a number of specific provisions that establish the treatment in bankruptcy cases of liabilities arising under another Federal statute.

[14] The 109th Congress, 1st Session had amended the Bankruptcy Code in early 2005 in the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 ("BAPCPA"). There,

See also Delta Air Lines, Inc. v. Bibb (*In re Delta Air Lines*), 359 B.R. 454, 464 (Bankr.S.D.N.Y.2006), quoting 4 COLLIER ON BANKRUPTCY ¶ 507.02 at 507-19 (15th ed. rev. 2006) ("To the extent a federal non-bankruptcy statute purports to affect priorities within a bankruptcy case, that statute is preempted by the more specific provisions in the Code.").

In *Chateaugay I*, the Second Circuit construed the bankruptcy term "claim" in the context of a Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act ("CERCLA") claim for environmental cleanup costs. In adopting a comprehensive environmental cleanup statute, Congress had imposed certain costs on polluters but had not purported to amend the Bankruptcy Code. The Court said, in words equally applicable here, "If the [Bankruptcy] Code, fairly construed, creates limits on the extent of environmental cleanup efforts, the remedy is for Congress to make exceptions to the Code to achieve other objectives that Congress chooses to reach, rather than for courts to restrict the meaning of across-the-board legislation like a bankruptcy law in order to promote objectives evident in more focused statutes." *Chateaugay I*, 944 F.2d at 1002; *see also In re*

Congress created new exceptions to discharge in § 523(a)(5) (domestic support obligations), § 523(a)(14A) (obligation incurred to pay a nondischargeable tax), § 523(a)(14B) (fines or penalties incurred under Federal election law), and § 523(a)(18) (loan from an employee benefit fund). Congress knew how to create an exception to discharge, and it could have amended the Bankruptcy Code when it passed the DRA but did not do so. Moreover, there is a further presumption that statutes passed in the same legislative session should be interpreted, if at all possible, so that each is given effect. *See Morf v. Bingaman*, 298 U.S. 407, 414, 56 S.Ct. 756, 80 L.Ed. 1245 (1936); *Auburn Housing*, 277 F.3d at 145.

Revere Copper and Brass Inc., 172 B.R. 192, 197 (S.D.N.Y.1994) (status of "claim" to be determined as "a matter of bankruptcy law . . . without reference to the policy concerns embodied in the CERCLA statute."). The Supreme Court has also consistently held that "Any doubt concerning the appropriate characterization [of a claim] is best resolved in accordance with the Bankruptcy Code's equal distribution aim." *See Howard Delivery Serv., Inc. v. Zurich Am. Ins. Co.*, 547 U.S. 651, 126 S.Ct. 2105, 2116, 165 L.Ed.2d 110 (2006); *see also Nathanson v. N.L.R.B.*, 344 U.S. 25, 29, 73 S.Ct. 80, 97 L.Ed. 23 (1952). Under these circumstances, it is telling, if not conclusive, that the PBGC has not argued—and has not cited any authority in support of the proposition—that Congress did in fact amend the Bankruptcy Code by creating a new nondischargeable debt for its benefit or by limiting the scope of the term "claim."

Did the Claim Arise Prepetition?

A further question is whether the obligation to pay DRA Premiums—the "claim"—should be classified as pre- or post-petition. Claimants with a prepetition claim possess a right to payment that arose prior to the filing of the bankruptcy petition. *See Manville Forest*, 209 F.3d at 128, *citing LTV Steel v. Shalala* (*In re Chateaugay Corp.*), 53 F.3d 478, 497 (2d Cir.1995) (hereinafter, "*Chateaugay II*"). The PBGC argues that because the liability became enforceable only after the distress termination of the pension plan, and because the distress termination in this case occurred post-petition, the liability is at worst a post-petition claim, entitled to be paid in full as an administrative expense of the Chapter 11 case. Oneida argues the "claim" is a prepetition claim

because it existed as a contingent claim at the time Oneida filed its bankruptcy petition.

The Bankruptcy Code does not specify when a "contingent claim" arises. The cases hold that "in the context of contract claims, the Code's inclusion of 'unmatured' and 'contingent' claims is usually said to refer to obligations that will become due upon the happening of a future event that was 'within the actual or presumed contemplation of the parties at the time the original relationship between the parties was created.'" *Chateaugay I*, 944 F.2d at 1004, *citing In re All Media Properties, Inc.*, 5 B.R. 126, 133 (Bankr. S.D. Tex. 1980), *aff'd mem.*, 646 F.2d 193 (5th Cir. 1981). Under the law of this Circuit, an indemnification agreement, for example, gives rise to a contingent claim at the time the agreement is executed; if the parties had an indemnification agreement prepetition, then the right to compel indemnification is treated as a prepetition claim, even if the remedy only became available post-petition. *See Manville Forest*, 209 F.3d at 129, *citing Houbigant, Inc. v. ABC Mercantile, Inc.* (*In re Houbigant, Inc.*), 188 B.R. 347, 358-59 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1995); *see also Woburn Assocs. v. Kahn* (*In re Hemingway Transport, Inc.*), 954 F.2d 1, 9, n. 9 (1st Cir. 1992).

Similarly, when a right to payment is created by a statutory obligation, the counterpart "claim" dates from the time of commencement of the relationship between the parties, not the date when the right to payment became enforceable. The Second Circuit's decision in *Chateaugay I* is directly on point. As noted above, the case addressed the statutory right of the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") to collect cleanup costs pursuant to CERCLA. In that case, the EPA's claim was treated as a prepetition claim; the

Court held that "the relationship between environmental regulating agencies and those subject to regulation provides sufficient 'contemplation' of contingencies to bring most ultimately maturing payment obligations based on prepetition conduct within the definition of 'claims.'" *Id.* at 1005.

The PBGC relies on an entirely different *Chateaugay* case, but it is inapposite. In *Chateaugay II*, 53 F.3d at 484-86, the Circuit Court considered a right to payment created by a statute that was enacted years after the debtor had filed its bankruptcy petition. The new Coal Industry Retiree Health Benefit Act of 1992 ("Coal Act") required companies in the debtor's business to pay premiums into a pension fund for retired mine workers, and the debtor challenged its obligations thereunder, arguing that the premiums were prepetition claims that should be disallowed because a proof of claim had not been filed. The Second Circuit held that "no right to payment . . . existed until the enactment of the Coal Act six years after the filing of LTV's petition." *Id.* at 497. It held that the obligation to pay was a post-petition liability.

The *Chateaugay* cases demonstrate that in determining when a contingent claim arises, the critical factor is whether, at the time of the petition, the parties contemplated that the contingent obligation would exist if the contingency occurred. At one end of the spectrum is the relationship between a future tort claimant and tortfeasor; the other end is the relationship between parties to a bargained—for indemnification contract. *See Chateaugay I*, 944 F.2d at 1005. In the former situation, parties do not contemplate that any obligation might be owed; in fact, the identities of the parties are not known. In

the latter case, the possibility that an obligation will become enforceable is expressly contemplated. Claims based on statutory obligations fall somewhere between these two poles. To the extent a right to payment created by statute is like an express contract entered into by parties prepetition, the liability will be deemed one arising prepetition.

In this case, all of the relevant facts militate toward a finding that the "claim" was in the parties' contemplation prior to the petition date. First, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was passed before Oneida filed its bankruptcy petition. Second, there does not appear to be any question that the Debtor intended to terminate its pension plans. In this case, the PBGC and Debtor met at least twice prior to filing, "discussed effectuating a distress termination of the Oneida Pension Plans" (Disc. St., p. 22), and they had agreed to the PBGC's treatment in a Chapter 11 plan. The parties had a prepetition relationship where it can fairly be said that the "claim" was within the parties' contemplation.[15]

Many of the cases cited above for the proposition that a pension obligation is a contingent claim in a bankruptcy case also involved the question whether

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[15] Further, the legislative history of the DRA Amendment indicates that Congress intended that potential debtors should contemplate the consequences of terminating their pension obligations in a bankruptcy case before they file. *See* H.R. Rep. No. 109-276 at 347-48 (Nov. 7, 2005) ("[T]he Committee does believe that the plan sponsors that have not [yet] filed a petition for bankruptcy reorganization must take into account the cost of the termination premium. . . ."). If a potential debtor must "take into account the cost of the termination premium," then such an obligation would have to be in the contemplation of the debtor prior to filing its bankruptcy petition.

the claim would be deemed a prepetition claim even though the contingency did not occur until after the filing of the petition. *See Trustees of Amalgamated Ins. Fund v. McFarlin's, Inc.*, 789 F.2d at 103; *In re Crane Rental*, 334 B.R. at 77; *In re CD Realty Partners*, 205 B.R. at 660; *In re Westmoreland Coal*, 213 B.R. at 15-16; *In re Pulaski Highway Exp.*, 57 B.R. at 508; *In re Silver Wheel Freightlines*, 57 B.R. at 479. For reasons stated in the *McFarlin*'s case, there are other grounds to find that the DRA Premiums are not administrative expenses, such as the fact that the consideration supporting the claimant's right to payment was not supplied and beneficial to the debtor in possession in the operation of the business. 789 F.2d at 101. In any event, for present purposes, the key fact is that pension claims have been considered as prepetition claims except where the plans were terminated after the debtor had confirmed its plan of reorganization.

Besides the "relationship and contemplation" test, courts sometimes apply a "conduct" test to determine whether a claim is prepetition or post-petition. *See, e.g., Epstein v. Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors (In re Piper Aircraft Corp.)*, 58 F.3d 1573, 1576, n. 4 (11th Cir.1995); *Grady v. A.H. Robins Co.*, 839 F.2d 198, 199 (4th Cir. 1988); *In re Johns-Manville Corp.*, 36 B.R. 743, 750 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1984). Oneida argues that under this test the PBGC possessed a prepetition claim because the "conduct" on which the "claim" is grounded, its employees' work, was performed prepetition. The Court is not persuaded; if any conduct triggered liability, it was the distress termination in the bankruptcy case. Courts employing the conduct test tend to do so when the claim is grounded in a tort or a conduct-related statutory obligation rather than a statutory pension-funding

obligation. *See In re CD Realty Partners*, 205 B.R. at 656. Even then, the conduct test is primarily useful only to determine whether a prepetition relationship recognized in tort law exists. *See In re Piper Aircraft*, 58 F.3d at 1577; *West v. Worldcom, Inc.*, 2007 WL 3407060 at (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 14, 2007).[16]

Notwithstanding the lack of relevance of the "conduct" test, this "claim" was in the contemplation of both parties before the petition date and, for purposes of the Debtor's Chapter 11 case, arose prepetition.

II. JUDICIAL ESTOPPEL

The PBGC finally argues that even if the DRA Premiums are "claims" for purposes of the Oneida Reorganization Plan, the Debtor should be barred from discharging them under the doctrine of judicial estoppel. The PBGC grounds its estoppel argument on the fact that at the Confirmation Hearing, the Debtor's chief financial officer included payment of the DRA Premiums in the Debtor's cash flow projections and never suggested that the Debtor might not

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[16] Oneida also cites *PBGC v. Skeen* (*In re Bayly Corp.*), 163 F.3d 1205 (10th Cir.1998), for the proposition that withdrawal liability to the PBGC is a prepetition claim, based on the fact that the pension benefits were accrued prepetition. In *Bayly*, however, the PBGC's proofs of claim against the debtor were based on a funding deficiency under 29 U.S.C. § 1368(b), which gives the PBGC a claim for the amount of the unfunded benefit liabilities under 29 U.S.C. § 1362(b)(1)(A). In this case, the PBGC's DRA Premium claim is not for a prepetition deficiency in plan funding but is based on damages arising out of termination of the plan. The connection between the claim and prepetition labor in *Bayly*, where the PBGCs claim was "predicated solely on benefits accrued by Debtor's employees as a result of pre-petition labor," is not present here. *In re Bayly*, 163 F.3d at 1206.

pay them in full. The Debtor, on the other hand, claims that its witness was being conservative in his projections, since Oneida might have to pay the Premiums in full and, in any event, would have to escrow an amount sufficient to cover the Premiums until the conclusion of litigation over an issue of first impression.

The doctrine of judicial estoppel serves to protect the "integrity of the judicial process" by "prohibiting parties from deliberately changing positions according to the exigencies of the moment." *New Hampshire v. Maine*, 532 U.S. 742, 749-50, 121 S.Ct. 1808, 149 L.Ed.2d 968 (2001) (internal citations omitted). The Supreme Court has identified three factors that warrant a finding of judicial estoppel—(i) a party's later position must be "clearly inconsistent" with its earlier position; (ii) the party must have successfully persuaded a court to adopt its earlier position, and adoption of the second, inconsistent position would "create the perception that either the first or second court was misled;" and (iii) it must be found that the party "would derive an unfair advantage or impose an unfair detriment on the opposing party if not estopped." *New Hampshire*, 532 U.S. at 750-51, 121 S.Ct. 1808 (internal citations omitted). As the Supreme Court noted there, "additional considerations may inform the doctrine's application in specific factual contexts." *Id.* at 751, 121 S.Ct. 1808; *see also, to the same effect*, *Zedner v. United States*, 547 U.S. 489, 126 S.Ct. 1976, 164 L.Ed.2d 749 (2006). In this Circuit, the Court of Appeals has emphasized that the doctrine is limited "to situations where the risk of inconsistent results with its impact on judicial integrity is certain." *Uzdavines v. Weeks Marine, Inc.*, 418 F.3d 138, 148, citing *Simon v. Safelite Glass Corp.*, 128 F.3d 68, 72 (2d Cir. 1997). A party seeking

to apply judicial estoppel must show both that its opponent has taken an inconsistent position and that a court in an earlier proceeding has adopted this position. *See Uzdavines*, 418 F.3d at 148 (2d Cir. 2005), *citing Stichting v. Schreiber*, 407 F.3d 34, 45 (2d Cir. 2005), *Rodal v. Anesthesia Group of Onondaga, P.C.*, 369 F.3d 113, 118 (2d Cir. 2004), *Adler v. Pataki*, 185 F.3d 35, 41, n. 3 (2d Cir. 1999).

There is no basis on the facts of this matter to conclude that Oneida took clearly inconsistent positions, or that the Court was misled or made an earlier determination that was plainly inconsistent with the finding that Oneida seeks in this proceeding. The Debtor's projections at the confirmation hearing were introduced for the purpose of proving feasibility under § 1129(a)(11) of the Bankruptcy Code. The Court's finding in the Confirmation Order that the Plan was feasible was not predicated on the premise that the Debtor *would* pay the DRA Premiums, only that it *could* pay them and all other expenses that it might conservatively anticipate. There would be no impact on the integrity of the Confirmation Order by the finding that Oneida now seeks, that the DRA Premiums were discharged "claims."

Nor can it be said that the Court was misled in confirming the Plan if the Debtor's right to challenge the DRA Premiums were also preserved. The confirmation testimony involved projections, which always involve contingencies. In any event, after the confirmation hearing, the PBGC and the Debtor agreed to a stipulation that finalized a Settlement Agreement that had been filed earlier but had never been approved. The Stipulation, like the earlier Settlement Agreement, expressly reserved both parties' rights

with respect to the status of the DRA Premiums. The Stipulation provided:

> Nothing contained in this Stipulation, the Disclosure Statement (or any supplements thereto), the Plan of Reorganization (or any supplements thereto), and the Confirmation Order, shall prejudice, preclude or otherwise affect any rights, obligations or arguments Oneida or the PBGC may have to challenge or enforce the validity of the DRA Provision, including, without limitation, the requirement to pay the DRA Premiums. (Order, ECF# 443, ¶ 5.)

The Court asked for clarification of this language, as the paragraph could be read to mean that the "Plan" and "Confirmation Order" would not "affect" (or discharge) the DRA Premiums; this seemed inconsistent with the parties' intentions as stated elsewhere. This resulted in the following colloquy:

> THE COURT: So this paragraph, in the PBGC's view, doesn't preclude the debtor from saying, we got a discharge, therefore, we don't have to pay the [Termination Premiums]?
>
> [Counsel for PBGC]: That's correct. Nor does it preclude the PBGC from taking the position that says this is a post-confirmation obligation.
>
> THE COURT: Very good. Okay. I thought that's exactly what the party's [sic] position was, but I didn't want the language in Paragraph 5, which is otherwise clear, to be possibly misconstrued. . . .

(Transcript of Hearing, dated October 26, 2006, at 10:11-11:3.)

The October colloquy establishes that both parties intended to reserve their rights, as they had earlier.

In all events, Oneida did not gain an unfair advantage on account of the confirmation testimony that the PBGC now quotes out of context. The PBGC also did not lose any rights, even though the parties, prior to the October hearing, did not underline the fact that the PBGC's agreement to take a $3 million note was subject to the caveat that, if it were successful in this litigation, it would receive the $3 million note plus the DRA Premiums in full. The estoppel doctrine (usually equitable estoppel) has been applied in appropriate circumstances in Chapter 11 cases when a creditor relies to his detriment on prior representations by a debtor. Full disclosure and fair treatment are cornerstones of the reorganization process. *See Momentum Mfg. Corp. v. Employee Creditors Comm. (In re Momentum Mfg. Corp.)*, 25 F.3d 1132, 1136 (2d Cir. 1994). However, this Court was not misled in connection with the confirmation hearing testimony. In light of the October Stipulation, the record could not be clearer that the PBGC was not misled, either. There is no threat to judicial integrity when neither the parties nor the tribunal is misled. *See Uzdavines*, 418 F.3d at 148.

CONCLUSION

The Court finds that the DRA Premiums, created by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, are prepetition "claims" that were discharged by the Debtor's Plan of Reorganization and that the Debtor is not estopped from obtaining such a finding. The Debtor is directed to settle an appropriate order on five days' notice.

APPENDIX C

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

[Filed July 14, 2009]

Docket Number: 08-2964-bk

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,
Defendant-Appellant,

v.

ONEIDA LTD.,
Plaintiff-Appellee.

ORDER

At a stated Term of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, held at the Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse, 500 Pearl Street, in the City of New York, on the 14th day of July, two thousand and nine.

Oneida LTD. having filed a petition for panel rehearing, or, in the alternative, for rehearing *en banc*, and the panel that determined the appeal having considered the request for panel rehearing, and the active members of the Court having considered the request for rehearing *en banc*,

IT IS HEREBY CONSIDERED that the petition is denied.

For the Court
Catherine O'Hagan Wolfe, Clerk

By: /s/ Frank Perez
Frank Perez, Deputy Clerk

Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
NOV 13 2009
OFFICE OF THE CLERK

No. 09-442

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

ONEIDA LTD.,

Petitioner,

v.

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,

Respondent.

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari To The United States Court Of Appeals For The Second Circuit

BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

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November 13, 2009

COUNTERSTATEMENT OF QUESTION PRESENTED

When a debtor terminates a pension plan during Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization proceedings, liability for the Termination Premium established by 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7) "shall not apply" until the debtor is discharged or dismissed from bankruptcy. In light of this express direction from Congress, did the court of appeals correctly hold that the Termination Premium is not a dischargeable bankruptcy claim?

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OPPOSITION TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Respondent Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation ("PBGC") urges the Court to deny the petition for *certiorari* filed by Oneida Ltd. ("Oneida"). Oneida seeks review of the sole appellate decision applying the termination premium established by 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7) ("Termination Premium") since the statute's enactment in 2006. That decision is sound—predicated on the express direction from Congress that liability for the Termination Premium "shall not apply" until after a company is discharged from bankruptcy. Because this case involves an express congressional directive concerning a federal statutory liability, review of this case would not aid in resolution of Oneida's asserted conflicts over when state law tort and contract liabilities give rise to claims dischargeable in bankruptcy.

FEDERAL STATUTE INVOLVED

The federal statute at issue is 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7). Although Oneida argues that only sections 1306(a)(7)(A) and (B) are pertinent, the Second Circuit opinion below is based on a more complete reading of the statute, and specifically also cites section 1306(a)(7)(C). The statute is attached in full in the Appendix to this brief ("Resp. App.").

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

A. PBGC

PBGC is the federal agency that administers the nation's pension plan termination insurance program established by Title IV of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA").[1] When a pension plan covered by Title IV terminates without sufficient assets to pay all of its promised benefits, PBGC typically becomes statutory trustee of the terminated plan and pays participants their benefits, up to the statutory limits.[2] PBGC protects the pensions of nearly 44 million workers and retirees in more than 29,000 private defined benefit pension plans.[3] PBGC's deficit is tens of billions of dollars.[4]

PBGC is self-financed, and obtains its revenues exclusively from five sources: (i) premiums paid by employers sponsoring ongoing plans; (ii) investment income; (iii) the assets in terminated plans; (iv) recoveries, if any, from employers whose underfunded plans have terminated; and (v) the Termination Premium.[5]

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[1] 29 U.S.C. §§ 1001-1461 (2006).

[2] *See* 29 U.S.C. §§ 1321, 1322, 1361.

[3] PBGC 2008 Annual Report, at inside cover, 1, 11, *available at* http://www.pbgc.gov/docs/2008_annual_report.pdf.

[4] PBGC Press Release No. 09-30, May 20, 2009, *available at* http://www.pbgc.gov/media/news-archive/news-releases/2009/pr09-30.html.

[5] PBGC 2008 Annual Report, at inside cover, 13, 44.

B. The Termination Premium

On February 8, 2006, Congress amended ERISA to add the Termination Premium, codified at 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7), which applies to sponsors of underfunded pension plans that terminate under certain circumstances.[6] The statute contains a "General Rule" establishing the Termination Premium, and a "Special Rule" dictating how the Termination Premium applies when a plan terminates during bankruptcy reorganization proceedings.[7]

Under the General Rule, a sponsor whose underfunded plan terminates under prescribed circumstances must pay the Termination Premium to PBGC for each of three 12-month periods after the plan termination date.[8] Under this General Rule, the obligation arises upon termination of the pension plan.[9] The Termination Premium is generally $1,250 per plan participant for each of the three periods.[10] The first period generally begins "with the first month following the month in which the termination date occurs."[11]

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[6] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7); Resp. App. 1a. Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. 109-171, 120 Stat. 4 (2006).

[7] 29 U.S.C. §§ 1306(a)(7)(A) (General Rule), 1306(a)(7)(B) (Special Rule); Resp. App. 1a-2a.

[8] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(A) & (C); Resp. App. 1a-3a.

[9] *Id.* Oneida incorrectly asserts that the obligation is imposed "immediately before" termination under the General Rule. Pet. at 3. In fact, it is the number of plan participants that is measured as of "immediately before" the termination date. 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B); Resp. App. 2a.

[10] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(A); Resp. App. 1a-2a.

[11] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(C)(i)(I); Resp. App. 2a.

In contrast, under the Special Rule, when a sponsor's plan terminates *during* bankruptcy reorganization proceedings, liability for the Termination Premium "shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of such person in such case."[12] In addition, the statute specifies that for plans terminated during bankruptcy reorganization, the first 12-month period begins the month *after* the debtor is discharged from bankruptcy.[13]

Drafted in the midst of increasing concern about the impact of PBGC's deficit on the overall federal deficit, Congress enacted the Termination Premium as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, and made it permanent by the Pension Protection Act of 2006.[14] Legislative history indicates dual purposes behind the Termination Premium. First, Congress sought to stabilize both PBGC and the overall federal budget, to "protect taxpayers from a possible multi-billion dollar bailout of the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC)."[15] Second,

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[12] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(B); Resp. App. 2a.

[13] 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(C)(ii); Resp. App. 3a.

[14] Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. 109-171, § 8101(b), 120 Stat. 4 (2006). 29 U.S.C. § 1306(a)(7)(E) (sunset provision) (repealed); Resp. App. 3a. Pension Protection Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-280, § 401(b)(1), 120 Stat. 780 (2006); C.A. App. A-814.

[15] H.R. Rep. No. 109-745, at 33 (2007)(Pension Protection Act "permanently establishing" the Termination Premium as well as enacting additional pension reforms); C.A. App. A-825. *See also* 151 Cong. Rec. S12912 (Nov. 16, 2005) (remarks by Sen. Levin) (debate on S.1783) (need to strengthen PBGC to avoid possible "taxpayer-financed bailout"); C.A. App. A-811 (*also available at* http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2005-11-

the Termination Premium was intended to discourage sponsors from "dumping" pension plans on PBGC.[16] Members of Congress noted the probable deterrent effect of the Termination Premium, and the Special Rule in particular:

> [B]y requiring employers that terminate their pensions in bankruptcy to pay an annual premium of $1,250 per participant to the PBGC for the 3 years after they emerge from bankruptcy, this bill makes terminating pension plans a less attractive option for employers. Companies who want to dump their pensions to escape bankruptcy and raise their bottom line will have a tougher time doing so.[17]

16/pdf/CREC-2005-11-16-pt1-PgS12884-2.pdf at 29). *See also* H.R. Rep. No. 109-276, at 62 (2005) (Termination Premium as part of two-pronged pension approach "to put the PBGC on a more secure financial foundation"); C.A. App. A-719.

[16] H.R. Rep. No. 109-276, at 347-48, 356; C.A. App. A-730-32, A-739, *quoted in* Second Circuit's opinion, Pet. App. at 6a. *See e.g.*, 151 Cong. Rec. H11661 (Dec. 15, 2005) (statement of Rep. McGovern) (debate re H.R. 2830) ("The PBGC is an insurance policy for America's workers.... But it is not supposed to be a dumping ground for corporations who want to boost their bottom line and just do not feel like paying the pensions they promised their workers."); C.A. App. A-798 (*also available at* http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2005-12-15/pdf/CREC-2005-12-15-pt1-PgH11660-5.pdf#page=1 at 2).

[17] 151 Cong. Rec. H11666 (Dec. 15, 2005) (statement of Rep. Souder) (debate re H.R. 2830) (*available at* http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2005-12-15/pdf/CREC-2005-12-15-pt1-PgH11660-5.pdf#page=1 at 7).

C. Oneida's Bankruptcy

One month after Congress enacted the Termination Premium, Oneida filed a voluntary petition for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code.[18] During the bankruptcy proceedings, PBGC and Oneida settled Oneida's sizeable liabilities for its unfunded pension liabilities, unpaid minimum funding contributions, and annual premiums for the one pension plan to be terminated.[19] PBGC received a $3 million promissory note for these unsecured claims of approximately $50 million.[20] But the parties specifically did not resolve whether the Termination Premium is a dischargeable bankruptcy claim, instead reserving their rights to challenge or to enforce the Termination Premium, as Oneida admits and the Second Circuit recognized.[21]

After discharge from bankruptcy, Oneida filed an adversary proceeding against PBGC, seeking a declaration that the Termination Premium was a bankruptcy "claim" under 11 U.S.C. § 101(5) that

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[18] Voluntary Petition, C.A. App. A-65-81.

[19] *See* Stipulation by and Between Reorganized Oneida Ltd. and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation ("Stipulation"), C.A. App. A-575-80.

[20] *Id.* Although Oneida refers to pension underfunding of "approximately $40 million" (Pet. at 4, citing bankruptcy court decision, Pet. App. 9a-10a), Oneida's own actuary estimated the underfunding to be approximately $50 million. Declaration of Sheila L. Yoensky [filed by Oneida], C.A. App. A-933-35.

[21] Stipulation, at C.A. App. A-576-77, A-579; Pet. at 5; Pet. App. at 3a (parties "preserv[ed] their respective rights to dispute or enforce payment of Termination Premiums").

had been discharged in the bankruptcy.[22] Pending the outcome of the litigation, the Parties established an escrow account into which Oneida placed the first two installments of its Termination Premium.[23] Oneida secured its third installment through an irrevocable standby letter of credit in PBGC's favor.[24]

The bankruptcy court ruled in Oneida's favor, concluding that a bankruptcy claim for the Termination Premium arises at plan termination, and that the Special Rule merely made the claim contingent.[25] The parties then jointly sought and obtained a direct appeal to the Second Circuit.

D. The Second Circuit's Decision

On April 8, 2009, the Second Circuit reversed the bankruptcy court's holding that the Termination Premium is a contingent pre-petition claim, dischargeable in bankruptcy. Proceeding from the plain language of the statute, the court determined that the Termination Premium did not apply to Oneida until its discharge from bankruptcy.[26] The court rejected the bankruptcy court's conclusion that the Termination Premium was a contingent claim, or "an obligation [that] has already been created prior to bankruptcy but is subject to a contingency."[27]

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[22] Complaint for Declaratory Relief, C.A. App. A-626-37.

[23] Escrow Agreement, C.A. App. A-639-58.

[24] Together, the escrow account and the letter of credit secure Oneida's liability of about $7 million for the Termination Premium, plus interest, pending final judgment in this case.

[25] Pet. App. at 21a.

[26] Pet. App. at 5a-7a.

[27] *Id.* at 5a.

Instead, the court concluded that "an employer's obligation to pay a Termination Premium on a pension plan that is terminated during the course of the bankruptcy does not even arise until the bankruptcy itself is terminated" and that "[n]o matter how broadly the term 'claim' is construed, it cannot extend to a right to payment that does not yet exist under federal law."[28] The court perceived no ambiguity in the statute, but noted that, even if there were, the legislative history of the Deficit Reduction Act and the Pension Protection Act were in "PBGC's favor."[29] The court held that the Termination Premium is not a claim in bankruptcy and, thus, not dischargeable.

ARGUMENT

I. BECAUSE A FEDERAL STATUTE, NOT STATE LAW OR FEDERAL COMMON LAW, SUPPLIES THE RULE OF DECISION, THERE IS NO CONFLICT BETWEEN THE DECISION BELOW AND ANY OTHER CIRCUIT DECISION.

Oneida seeks to invoke this Court's *certiorari* jurisdiction to resolve a conflict that is not present in this case. Oneida argues that the court's reasoning below is "consistent with" the Third Circuit's decision in *In re M. Frenville Co. Inc.*,[30] and that *Frenville* conflicts with the decisions of six other Circuits. In those decisions, the courts developed various federal common law rules to assess when a

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[28] *Id.* at 5a-6a.

[29] *Id.* at 6a.

[30] Pet. at 7; 744 F.2d 332 (3d Cir. 1984).

bankruptcy claim arises, rejecting *Frenville's* use of state law. But because the liability for the Termination Premium "shall not apply" until a debtor's discharge, Congress has expressly answered the question when that liability arises for a reorganizing plan sponsor. Thus, a federal statute, not state law or federal common law, supplies the rule of decision. Oneida posits a false conflict.

The Second Circuit did not rely on or even cite to *Frenville*. *No* party had cited *Frenville* before Oneida's motion for rehearing below. In *Frenville*, the court applied state law in determining whether a bankruptcy claim arose post-petition and thus avoided the automatic stay, noting that "[i]f there were some overriding federal policy, we might have the power to develop federal law."[31] The Circuit decisions cited by Oneida developed various federal common law rules, believing that *Frenville's* rule unduly narrowed the scope of "claim" under 11 U.S.C. § 101(5).[32] But neither *Frenville* nor any of

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[31] 744 F.2d at 337 n.8.

[32] *In re Parker*, 313 F.3d 1267 (10th Cir. 2002) (applying "conduct" theory to legal malpractice under state law); *Butler v. NationsBank, N.A.*, 58 F.3d 1022 (4th Cir. 1995) (applying "conduct" theory to forged checks under state law); *Epstein v. Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors (In re Piper Aircraft)*, 58 F.3d 1573 (11th Cir. 1995)(applying "pre-petition relationship" test to product liability under state law); *Lemelle v. Universal Mfg. Corp.*, 18 F.3d 1268 (5th Cir. 1994) (same); *In re Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific RR Co.*, 974 F.2d 775 (7th Cir. 1992) (balancing CERCLA and Bankruptcy Code policies, where federal non-bankruptcy law did not dictate treatment in connection with bankruptcy); *In re Hassanally*, 208 B.R. 46 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 1997) (applying "fair contemplation" test to negligent construction claim under state law); *In re Jensen*, 995

the other Circuit cases decided whether a bankruptcy claim exists when a federal statute explicitly provides that the liability under the statute applies only upon the debtor's discharge or dismissal from bankruptcy.

In this case, a federal statute determines whether *any* bankruptcy claim for the Termination Premium exists when a pension plan is terminated during bankruptcy reorganization. In applying the "unambiguous" language of the Special Rule, the Second Circuit concluded that "[n]o matter how broadly the term 'claim' is construed, it cannot extend to a right to payment that does not yet exist under federal law."[33] Thus, the varying federal common law rules that other Circuits have used to determine how tort- or contract-based claims are treated in bankruptcy are wholly inapplicable in this case. And resolving a conflict between them and *Frenville* will not resolve the question presented here, which is not the subject of any conflict between the Circuits. Nor would addressing the issue presented here resolve the *Frenville* conflict.

This Court has made clear that "federal common law is 'subject to the paramount authority of Congress.'"[34] Federal common law is "resorted to '[in] absence of an applicable Act of Congress,'"[35]

F.2d 925 (9th Cir. 1993) (hazardous waste cleanup under state law).

[33] Pet. App. at 6a.

[34] *Milwaukee v. Illinois*, 451 U.S. 304, 313 (1981), *quoting New Jersey v. New York*, 283 U.S. 336, 348 (1931).

[35] *Milwaukee*, 451 U.S. at 314, *quoting Clearfield Trust Co. v. United States*, 318 U.S. 363, 367 (1943).

when courts are "compelled to consider federal questions 'which cannot be answered from federal statutes alone.'"[36]

In this case, an express congressional direction addresses the issue presented, making resort to federal common law inappropriate. The Second Circuit viewed the statutory language as dispositive: "Congress may prescribe when a claim will be legally effective for the purposes of the Bankruptcy Code, at least where, as here, the non-bankruptcy statute *explicitly* discusses how the obligation should be treated in bankruptcy."[37] As the Court stated in *O'Melveny & Myers v. FDIC,* the argument that statutory language should be read as "supplemented or modified by federal common law" is "demolished" by provisions of the statute that directly address the matter.[38] Accordingly, the Second Circuit properly applied the explicit statutory language rather than judicially created common law that would negate the statute.

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[36] *Id., quoting D'Oench, Duhme & Co. v. FDIC*, 315 U.S. 447, 469 (1942) (Jackson, J., concurring).

[37] Pet. App. at 5a (emphasis in original). The Second Circuit noted that the result might be different if the case involved a contract, rather than an explicit federal statute. *Id.*

[38] 512 U.S. 79, 86 (1994); *see also NWA v. Transport Workers Union*, 451 U.S. 77, 95 n.34 (1981) ("[O]nce Congress addresses a subject, even a subject previously governed by federal common law, the justification for lawmaking by the federal courts is greatly diminished. Thereafter, the task of the federal courts is to interpret and apply statutory law, not to create common law.")

In sum, resolving the alleged conflict Oneida describes—about when contingent bankruptcy claims arise in the absence of federal statutory direction—would not dispose of this case. And this case is not a vehicle for resolving that conflict, because the Special Rule has displaced federal common law. Not only is the ruling below the first Circuit court decision concerning the Special Rule, it is the only Circuit court decision to address *any* aspect of the Termination Premium in the three years since its enactment. This is neither the right case nor the right time to resolve the conflict suggested by Oneida.

II. BECAUSE THE DECISION BELOW IS BASED ON THE DECISIONS OF THIS COURT, IT PRESENTS NO IMPORTANT QUESTION OF FEDERAL LAW TO BE SETTLED BY THIS COURT.

The petition also fails to raise a worthwhile federal question. As this Court has emphasized, "[c]reditors' entitlements in bankruptcy arise in the first instance from the underlying substantive law creating the debtor's obligation, subject to any qualifying or contrary provisions of the Bankruptcy Code."[39] Under *Travelers* and *Raleigh*, the substantive non-bankruptcy law that gives rise to a debtor's obligation determines the existence and validity of a bankruptcy claim for that obligation.[40]

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[39] *Travelers Cas. & Sur. Co. of Am. v. PG&E*, 549 U.S. 443, 450 (2007), *quoting Raleigh v. Ill. Dep't of Revenue*, 530 U.S. 15, 20 (2000).

[40] *Travelers*, 549 U.S. at 450; *Raleigh*, 530 U.S. at 20.

In this case, the substantive non-bankruptcy law—ERISA—explicitly states that the Termination Premium does not apply to a debtor until it emerges from bankruptcy. As the Second Circuit held, it is "apparent from the face of the relevant statutory provisions that '[i]n the case of termination due to reorganization, the liability for the [termination] premium *does not arise* until the employer is discharged from the reorganization proceeding.'"[41] "The obvious purpose of this rule," the court held, "is to prevent employers from evading the Termination Premium while seeking reorganization in bankruptcy."[42] As the court noted, even if there were any ambiguity in the statute, the legislative history confirms this clear purpose.[43]

Oneida does not argue that the statutory language is ambiguous, or that Congress lacked authority to enact it. It merely observes that Congress did not "impliedly" amend the Bankruptcy Code.[44] PBGC agrees. There was no need, as the Termination Premium expressly does not apply to a reorganizing debtor until it emerges from bankruptcy. Thus, while Oneida continues to assume that the Termination Premium is a bankruptcy "claim," even mischaracterizing the Second Circuit's decision as "not disturbing" the bankruptcy court's "factual finding" concerning "PBGC's claim for Termination Premiums,"[45] the

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[41] Pet. App. at 3a (citation omitted) (emphasis in original).

[42] *Id.* at 5a.

[43] Pet. App. at 6a-7a.

[44] Pet. at 13.

[45] Pet. at 6, 12.

court of appeals clearly ruled that no such bankruptcy claim existed. Because this holding is fully consistent with the decisions of this Court, it presents no ground for review.

III. THE PETITION'S POLICY ARGUMENTS PROVIDE NO REASON TO GRANT REVIEW.

Oneida urges the Court to grant review to prevent forum-shopping by companies that seek to avoid paying the full Termination Premium to make their reorganizations more "effective."[46] Oneida suggests that review is necessary to keep debtors from shopping for a bankruptcy court outside the Second or Third Circuit in the hope of paying only a portion of this liability. But no other Circuit has addressed this issue. And many companies have continued to file Chapter 11 petitions in Delaware and New York after the lower court's decision of April 8, 2009, notwithstanding substantial pension obligations.[47]

Moreover, helping companies to avoid the Termination Premium is no reason to grant review. As Oneida recognizes, shoring up the federal pension

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[46] Pet. at 14.

[47] A few examples include Cooper-Standard Automotive, Inc., No. 09-12743 (PJW) (Bankr. D. Del.) (filed Aug. 3, 2009), Lear Corporation, No. 09-14326 (ALG) (Bankr. S.D.N.Y.) (filed Jul. 7, 2009), Six Flags, Inc. No. 09-12019 (CSS) (Bankr. D. Del.) (filed Jun. 13, 2009), General Motors Corp., No. 09-50026 (REG) (Bankr. S.D.N.Y.) (filed Jun. 1, 2009), Visteon Corp., No. 09-11786 (CSS) (Bankr. D. Del.) (filed May 28, 2009), Mark IV Industries, No. 09-12795 (SMB) (Bankr. S.D.N.Y.) (filed Apr. 30, 2009), and Chrysler, LLC, No. 09-50002 (AJG) (Bankr. S.D.N.Y.) (filed Apr. 30, 2009).

insurance program—admittedly a "worthwhile objective"—was Congress's "ostensible primary purpose" in implementing the Termination Premium.[48] Indeed, PBGC's significant deficit—at that time $22.8 billion—and the growing trend of plan sponsors' use of Chapter 11 reorganization to force their pension obligations onto PBGC were principal reasons for the enactment of the Termination Premium.[49] The Congressional Budget Office estimated that collections from the Termination Premium would total about $1 billion between 2006 and 2010 and $1.4 billion between 2006 and 2015, without discounting for any limited recovery in bankruptcy, thereby helping to alleviate PBGC's continuing financial difficulties.[50]

Although Oneida would nevertheless like the Termination Premium to be "subject to compromise and discharge in bankruptcy court" (Pet. at 17), that is an argument for Congress, not the Court.

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[48] Pet. at 17.

[49] *See, e.g.*, H.R. Rep. No. 109-232, pt. 2, at 114 (2005), C.A. App. A-704 (*also available at* 2005 WL 3343873); H.R. Rep. No. 109-745, at 6, 32, C.A. App. A-823-24; 151 Cong. Rec. S12067 (Oct. 31, 2005) (remarks by Sen. Gregg), C.A. App. A-760 (*also available at* http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getpage.cgi?position=all&page=S12067&dbname=2005_record); 151 Cong. Rec. S12912 (Nov. 16, 2005) (remarks by Sen. Levin), C.A. App. A-811 (also available at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2005-11-16/pdf/CREC-2005-11-16-pt1-PgS12884-2.pdf at 29); 152 Cong. Rec. H6160 (Jul. 28, 2006) (remarks by Rep. Boehner), C.A. App. A-827 (*also available at* http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2006-07-28/pdf/CREC-2006-07-28-pt1-PgH6040.pdf at 121).

[50] Congressional Budget Office Cost Estimate, S.1932, Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, at 75, 109th Cong. (Jan. 27, 2006), C.A. App. A-779.

Congress expressly and knowingly imposed the Termination Premium on companies that emerge from bankruptcy reorganization after shifting their pension obligations onto the federal insurance program. Congress emphasized that "[t]he bankruptcy courts should not be used as a mechanism for eliminating the burden of an underfunded pension plan; therefore, an additional premium paid to the PBGC to recognize the agency's assumption of unfunded plan liabilities is reasonable."[51] As the Second Circuit held, allowing compromise and discharge of the Termination Premium as a "bankruptcy claim" would "directly thwart Congress's aim" in making it applicable only upon the company's emergence from bankruptcy.[52]

In sum, Oneida's policy arguments provide no more basis than its legal arguments for this Court to grant review. Oneida has no evidence to show that the Second Circuit's decision has led to any forum-shopping. Yet PBGC's massive deficit suggests a continuing need for the financial recovery the Termination Premium provides. Oneida has not made the case for review.

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[51] H.R. Rep. No. 109-276, at 348, *quoted in* Second Circuit's opinion, Pet. App. at 6a.

[52] Pet. App. at 7a.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court should deny Oneida's petition for writ of *certiorari*.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

UNITED STATES CODE SERVICE
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*** CURRENT THROUGH PL 110-324, APPROVED 9/24/2008 ***

TITLE 29. LABOR
CHAPTER 18. EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT INCOME SECURITY PROGRAM
PLAN TERMINATION INSURANCE
PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION

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29 USCS § 1306

§ 1306. Premium rates

(a) Schedules for premium rates and bases for application; establishment, coverage, etc.

...

(7) Premium rate for certain terminated single-employer plans.

(A) In general. If there is a termination of a single-employer plan under clause (ii) or (iii) of section 4041(c)(2)(B) [*29 USCS § 1341(c)(2)(B)*] or section 4042 [*29 USCS § 1342*], there shall be payable to the corporation, with respect to each applicable 12-

month period, a premium at a rate equal to $ 1,250 multiplied by the number of individuals who were participants in the plan immediately before the termination date. Such premium shall be in addition to any other premium under this section.

(B) Special rule for plans terminated in bankruptcy reorganization. In the case of a single-employer plan terminated under section 4041(c)(2)(B)(ii) [*29 USCS § 1341(c)(2)(B)(ii)*] or under section 4042 [*29 USCS § 1342*] during pendency of any bankruptcy reorganization proceeding under chapter 11 of title 11, United States Code [*11 USCS §§ 1101* et seq.], or under any similar law of a State or a political subdivision of a State (or a case described in section 4041(c)(2)(B)(i) [*29 USCS § 1341(c)(2)(B)(i)*] filed by or against such person has been converted, as of such date, to such a case in which reorganization is sought), subparagraph (A) shall not apply to such plan until the date of the discharge or dismissal of such person in such case.

(C) Applicable 12-month period. For purposes of subparagraph (A)—

(i) In general. The term "applicable 12-month period" means—

(I) the 12-month period beginning with the first month following the month in which the termination date occurs, and

(II) each of the first two 12-month periods immediately following the period described in subclause (I).

(ii) Plans terminated in bankruptcy reorganization. In any case in which the requirements of subparagraph (B) are met in connection with the termination of the plan with respect to 1 or more persons described in such subparagraph, the 12-month period described in clause (i)(I) shall be the 12-month period beginning with the first month following the month which includes the earliest date as of which each such person is discharged or dismissed in the case described in such clause in connection with such person.

(D) Coordination with section 4007.

(i) Notwithstanding section 4007 [*29 USCS § 1307*]—

(I) premiums under this paragraph shall be due within 30 days after the beginning of any applicable 12-month period, and

(II) the designated payor shall be the person who is the contributing sponsor as of immediately before the termination date.

(ii) The fifth sentence of section 4007(a) [*29 USCS § 1307(a)*] shall not apply in connection with premiums determined under this paragraph.

(E) [Repealed]

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No. 09-442

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

ONEIDA LTD.,
Petitioner,

v.

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION,
Respondent.

On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

REPLY BRIEF FOR PETITIONER

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Oneida's petition demonstrated that the circuit courts of appeals disagree on whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law determines that a contingent claim is a pre-petition claim subject to compromise or discharge in a bankruptcy proceeding. Pet. 8-14.

In opposition, PBGC does not dispute the existence of the conflict among the circuit courts of appeals, the importance of that conflict to the fair administration of our nation's bankruptcy laws, or the need to resolve the conflict in an appropriate case. Opp. 8-10. Instead, PBGC contends that this case is not an appropriate "vehicle for resolving that conflict" (*id.* at 12), for two reasons. First, PBGC contends that the

"conflict . . . is not present in this case" (*id.* at 8) because the conflict is whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy *state* law determines that a contingent claim is a pre-petition claim (*id.* at 1 ("conflicts over . . . state law tort and contract liabilities"); *see id.* at 8-10). The Termination Premiums imposed by the DRA in this case arise under federal law. Second, PBGC contends that resolving the conflict "would not dispose of this case" (Opp. 12) because "a federal statute explicitly provides that the liability under the statute applies only upon the debtor's discharge or dismissal from bankruptcy" (*id.* at 10).

Contrary to PBGC's contentions, this case is the ideal vehicle to resolve the conflict whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law determines that a contingent claim is a pre-petition claim. Although PBGC contends that the conflict is limited to "state law tort and contract liabilities" (Opp. 1), one of the circuit courts on the majority side of the conflict held that a federal CERCLA claim was contingent and therefore barred as a matter of bankruptcy law notwithstanding ***federal*** non-bankruptcy law. *In re Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific RR Co.*, 974 F.2d 775, 785-86 (7th Cir. 1992) (cited at Pet. 10 and Opp. 9 n.32). The conflict is thus not limited to state non-bankruptcy law. The Second Circuit's decision below directly conflicts with the Seventh Circuit's decision that bankruptcy law controls whether a claim is subject to discharge.

PBGC's second contention – that non-bankruptcy law should "dispose of this case" (Opp. 12) in the majority of circuits because it is "explicit[]" (*id.* at 10) – simply disregards the reasoning of those circuits that bankruptcy law controls whether a contingent claim is a pre-petition claim. In the view of the

majority of the circuit courts, whether state or federal non-bankruptcy law is explicit, indefinite, or even incomprehensible is irrelevant to classifying the contingent claim as pre- or post-petition. Bankruptcy law controls that determination because of the breadth of the "claim" definition in 11 U.S.C. § 101(5) and the objective of including all assets and claims within the bankruptcy estate in order to fairly allocate them among creditors and give the debtor a fresh start. Far from being a reason to decline review, to the extent the non-bankruptcy law at issue here is "explicit[]" (Opp. 10), the conflict among the circuits is presented at its sharpest and this case is the perfect vehicle to resolve the division.

By referring to the "explicit" and "express" nature of ERISA's special rule 12 times (Opp. i, 1, 9, 10, 11 & n.37, 13, 16), PBGC seems to suggest that Congress has decided that Termination Premiums are not "claim[s]" within the meaning of the Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. § 101(5), and that the law used by the circuit courts to determine whether obligations are pre-petition claims in other contexts has no application to Termination Premiums. PBGC's suggestion may be superficially seductive, but it is demonstrably wrong as a matter of federal bankruptcy law because it constitutes an implied amendment of the definition of "claim." As Oneida explained in its petition, "PBGC did not contend that the DRA impliedly amended the Bankruptcy Code" in either court below, and "implied amendment would conflict with this Court's clear-statement requirement for amendments to the Bankruptcy Code." Pet. 13-14 (citing *United States v. Reorganized CF & I Fabricators of Utah, Inc.*, 518 U.S. 213, 219 (1996)). PBGC never answers the petition on those points. It never explains the legal significance of supposed clarity of ERISA's special rule. It does

not cite, let alone distinguish, this Court's decision in *Reorganized CF & I Fabricators of Utah*. And "PBGC agrees" (explicitly and expressly) that "Congress did not 'impliedly' amend the Bankruptcy Code." Opp. 13. The "explicit" and "express" nature of the DRA's (later ERISA's) special rule thus does not take this case outside the conflict among the circuit courts of appeals or provide an independent ground for the judgment below.

This case presents an ideal vehicle to resolve a conflict on an important and recurring issue of bankruptcy law that now involves eight of the circuit courts of appeals and that has bedeviled the circuit courts for twenty-five years. Given the critical importance of the bankruptcy laws in these times of economic distress, and especially the threshold issue of which "claim[s]" are pre-petition and subject to compromise or discharge in bankruptcy, this Court should grant plenary review.

I. THIS CASE PRESENTS A DIRECT CONFLICT AMONG THE CIRCUIT COURTS OF APPEALS

PBGC contends that the "conflict" whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law controls the pre- or post-petition character of a contingent claim "is not present in this case" (Opp. 8) because the conflict is limited to "state law tort and contract liabilities" (*id.* at 1; *see id.* at 8-10). Both parties agree that the Termination Premiums are imposed by federal law.

Contrary to PBGC's contention, the circuit courts disagree on whether bankruptcy law or non-bankruptcy law controls the pre- or post-petition character of a contingent claim even if the non-bankruptcy law is federal rather than state law. On the majority side

of the conflict, as identified in Oneida's petition (Pet. 10), and as PBGC tacitly admits in a footnote (Opp. 9 n.32), the Seventh Circuit in *In re Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific RR Co.*, 974 F.2d 775, applied bankruptcy law to hold that a ***federal CERCLA obligation*** was a contingent claim and therefore barred, notwithstanding that the CERCLA obligation had not yet accrued because no response costs had yet been incurred (974 F.2d at 785-86):

> WSDOT argues that because a party must incur response costs in order to have a CERCLA cause of action, a party likewise must incur response costs before it has a dischargeable claim for purposes of Section 77 [of the Bankruptcy Act of 1898, 11 U.S.C. § 205 (replaced by 11 U.S.C. § 101(5) of the current Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1978)]. . . . The problem, however, is that parties are often obligated to bring contingent claims in order to avoid discharge in a Section 77 proceeding, and as such the fact that response costs are necessary for an actual claim to accrue under CERCLA does not necessarily mean that such costs are necessary for a contingent CERCLA claim to accrue under Section 77.
>
> . . .
>
> [R]ather than adopting such a[n accrual] rule, or any rule, we explain below that when a potential CERCLA claimant can tie the bankruptcy debtor to a known release of a hazardous substance which this potential claimant knows will lead to CERCLA response costs, and when this potential claimant has, in fact, conducted tests with regard to this contamination problem, then this potential claimant has, at least, a contingent CERCLA claim for purposes of Section 77.

In a revealing footnote (Opp. 9 n.32), PBGC acknowledges that the Seventh Circuit's decision rejecting the accrual rule of *In re M. Frenville Co., Inc.*, 744 F.2d 332, 337 (3d Cir. 1984), applied bankruptcy law to bar a "CERCLA" claim notwithstanding such "***federal*** non-bankruptcy law" (emphasis added). In addition, the Ninth Circuit's decision in *In re Jensen*, 995 F.2d 925 (9th Cir. 1998) (*per curiam*), although it "discharged" a "contingent claim for cleanup costs" arising under California law (*id.* at 931), relied primarily on the reasoning of federal CERCLA decisions (*id.* at 928-31).

The Second Circuit's decision below conflicts not only with the Seventh Circuit's decision, but also with the five other circuits that constitute the majority view that bankruptcy law determines whether an obligation is a "claim" for purposes of a bankruptcy proceeding and the pre- or post-petition nature of that claim. In the petition (Pet. 13), Oneida remarked that the Second Circuit "offered no principle to distinguish between federal and non-federal non-bankruptcy law." In its opposition, PBGC offers no reason why the source of the non-bankruptcy law should make any difference to the determination whether an obligation is a "claim" subject to compromise and discharge in a bankruptcy proceeding. The Ninth Circuit's decision in *Jensen*, which relies on decisions involving both federal and state environmental obligations, suggests that the source of law is a distinction without a difference.

PBGC ultimately appears to agree that the choice is between bankruptcy law and non-bankruptcy law, regardless of whether the non-bankruptcy law is federal or state. After arguing in point I of the opposition that no conflict exists (Opp. 8-12), PBGC argues

in point II that "substantive non-bankruptcy law . . . determines the existence and validity of a bankruptcy claim for that obligation" (Opp. 12) (footnote omitted). That position, of course, directly conflicts with the decisions of the six circuit courts of appeals in the majority. Pet. 10-11. That position is also the legal theory proposed by PBGC in the court below (Pet. 6; PBGC C.A. Br. 2, 4-5, 18, 27) and adopted by the Second Circuit (Pet. App. 4a-5a ("[t]o make these determinations [of 'whether the claimant possessed a right to payment' and 'whether that right arose before the filing of the petition'] we look to the substantive non-bankruptcy law that gives rise to the debtor's obligation" (internal citation omitted))). The conflict is direct and glaring.

To be sure, this case is the first manifestation of the conflict in the context of Termination Premiums. Opp. 1, 12, 14. But given the opportunities for forum shopping (Pet. 15) and the pressures to settle disputes, this Court cannot confidently wait for a later case on precisely the same contingent claim. Nor does PBGC explain why, after 25 years of cases involving eight circuit courts and multiple contingent claims, additional decisions are required to illuminate the acknowledged conflict. Moreover, although the conflict is not discussed by the Second Circuit below (Opp. 9), the court's reasoning leaves no doubt that its decision follows the Third Circuit's decision in *Frenville* and conflicts with the decisions of the courts of appeals for the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits that are openly critical of *Frenville*. *See Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 842 (1984) ("this Court reviews judgments, not opinions") (citations omitted); *Black v. Cutter Laboratories*, 351 U.S. 292, 297 (1956) ("This Court, however, reviews

judgments, not statements in opinions.") (citations omitted); *McClung v. Silliman*, 6 Wheat. 598, 603 (1821) ("The question before an appellate Court is, was the *judgment* correct . . . .") (emphasis Court's).

II. RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT IN FAVOR OF THE MAJORITY VIEW WOULD REVERSE THE JUDGMENT BELOW

The Second Circuit relied on "substantive non-bankruptcy law" (Pet. App. 4a-5a) to determine that the Termination Premiums were post-petition claims. If bankruptcy law had applied instead, then Oneida's Termination Premiums would plainly have been pre-petition contingent claims subject to compromise or discharge. The Bankruptcy Code contains a broad definition of "claim." 11 U.S.C. § 101(5). That definition includes "contingent" claims. *Id.* § 101(5)(A). Applying the pre-petition relationship "claim" test to the bankruptcy court's undisturbed factual finding of a pre-petition relationship compels the conclusion, under the majority view, that Oneida's Termination Premiums are pre-petition claims subject to compromise and discharge in bankruptcy. Pet. 12-13.

PBGC does not dispute that application of bankruptcy law would require reversal of the judgment below. Instead, it contends that non-bankruptcy law should "dispose of this case" (Opp. 12) – presumably, even in the majority of circuits that apply bankruptcy law rather than substantive non-bankruptcy law – because the non-bankruptcy law imposing the Termination Premiums is so "explicit[]" (Opp. 10). PBGC seems to think that the pre-petition relationship test and other statutory interpretations of the "claim" definition in 11 U.S.C. § 101(5) are "federal common law rules" (Opp. 9) that are "demolished" by the DRA

because the latter statute "directly address[es] the matter" (Opp. 11). *See id.* at 8-12.

By interpreting the definition of "claim" in the Bankruptcy Code, however, the majority of circuit courts engaged in statutory interpretation, not the creation of federal common law. *See* RICHARD H. FALLON, JR., JOHN F. MANNING, DANIEL J. MELTZER & DAVID L. SHAPIRO, HART AND WECHSLER'S THE FEDERAL COURTS AND THE FEDERAL SYSTEM 607 (6th ed. 2009) (defining federal common law as "federal rules of decision whose content cannot be traced directly by traditional methods of interpretation to federal statutory or constitutional commands"). The reasoning in the majority decisions applies traditional methods of statutory interpretation. PBGC offers no authority to suggest that the majority is making federal common law. And we are aware of no decision of this Court that has held that interpreting an Act of Congress (such as the definition of "claim" in the Bankruptcy Code) creates federal common law. The premise of PBGC's argument – that the circuit court decisions in the majority rest on judge-made federal common law that must give way to a statute enacted by Congress – is false, and its conclusion – that the judgment below is independent of the conflict among the circuit courts – does not follow.

As explained above (*supra* p. 3), PBGC's repeated refrain that ERISA's special rule is "explicit" and "express" (Opp. i, 1, 9, 10, 11 & n.37, 13, 16) does not support an implied amendment of the "claim" definition to create a new category of non-dischargeable claims. PBGC did not argue for an implied amendment in either court below and does not defend an implied amendment here. Opp. 13. Because PBGC mentions the specificity of the special rule so many

times, however, it is important to note why the specificity of a subsequent statute does not control treatment of Termination Premiums as a matter of bankruptcy law.

For exceptions to discharge adopted as part of non-bankruptcy laws to be recognized in bankruptcy, the Bankruptcy Code itself must be reciprocally amended. *See United States v. Reorganized CF&I Fabricators of Utah*, 518 U.S. at 219. Even though Congress amended the Bankruptcy Code to create several new non-dischargeable debts only months before adopting the DRA Amendment, Congress provided "no direction that the DRA Premium [was] not [to] be considered a claim under the Bankruptcy Code." Pet. App. 26a; *see id.* at 24a-28a. Congress did not do so even though at least one of the new non-dischargeable debts related to pension and ERISA matters. 11 U.S.C. § 523(a)(18) (excepting from discharge obligations on loans taken from pension plans "as permitted under Section 408(b)(1) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974"). Although the special rule might be sufficiently "explicit" (Opp. 10, 11 & n.37, 13) in other contexts, the absence of a reciprocal amendment means that it is not explicit for purposes of the Bankruptcy Code. *See PBGC v. CF&I Fabricators of Utah, Inc. (In re CF&I Fabricators of Utah, Inc.)*, 150 F.3d 1293, 1297 (10th Cir. 1998) ("As we read the [Supreme] Court's analysis [in *CF&I Fabricators*], the key to whether a statutory provision is 'explicit' in this context is whether the *Bankruptcy Code* adopts and makes specific reference to the provisions of the other law.") (emphasis court's).

* * * * *

PBGC's remaining arguments pertain to the merits (*e.g.*, the committee report and floor statements dis-

cussing ERISA's special rule, Opp. 5 & nn.16-17) or matters of public policy (*e.g.*, PBGC's deficit and its need to collect Termination Premiums, Opp. 2, 15-16). Oneida would address those merits and policy arguments on plenary review.* In the meantime, Oneida suggests that the public policy arguments on

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* One comment is appropriate at the petition stage in response to PBGC's citation of recent bankruptcy filings in the District of Delaware and the Southern District of New York as proof that debtors with "substantial pension obligations" (Opp. 14 n.47) have not shopped for forums outside the Second and Third Circuits. Needless to say, substantial pension obligations provide no reason for debtors to engage in forum shopping. Substantial *Termination Premiums* provide the financial incentive for forum shopping. Although PBGC lists seven recent bankruptcy filings, it does not represent that any of the debtors faced substantial Termination Premiums that they might have avoided by filing in a bankruptcy court in a district outside the Second and Third Circuits. The two largest bankruptcies involved GM and Chrysler. Neither debtor faced Termination Premiums because both had federal bail-outs and their pension plans were transferred along with their productive assets to the bailed-out companies. *See* http://www.pbgc.gov/workers-retirees/auto-sector.html. The auto parts suppliers and theme park debtors likewise faced no Termination Premiums because they filed for bankruptcy, not to terminate their pension plans, but to reduce their leverage. *See, e.g.*, Ryan Beene, *Lear Posts Profit After Emerging from Bankruptcy*, CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS (Nov. 11, 2009), available at http://www.plasticsnews.com/headlines2.html?id=17122&channel=82 ("Lear's four-month trip through bankruptcy . . . removed about $2.8 billion of debt from its balance sheet. . . . [Lear] continued to fund its pension plan."); Tom Hals, *Former Execs Offer to Manage Bankrupt Six Flags*, Reuters.com (Aug. 18, 2009), http://www.reuters.com/article/euMergersNews/idUSN1842564320090818 ("[Larry Cochrane, former chairman of Six Flags, Inc.,] said the bankruptcy resulted from too much debt."); Tim Hicks, *Mark IV Files Chapter 11 Petition*, THE PEOPLE-SENTINEL (May 14, 2009), *available at* http://www.thepeoplesentinel.com/news/mark-iv-files-chapter-11-petition ("The company was overleveraged.").

both sides are a further consideration, in addition to the long-standing conflict among the circuit courts of appeal, that weighs in favor of this Court's review.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons and those in the Petition, the petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted.

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